SHORT STORIES

No. 763.] Week ending August 15th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

A PANEL OF THE DOOR WAS DASHED IN AND A HAND INSERTED.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Power of the Past." See page 199.)

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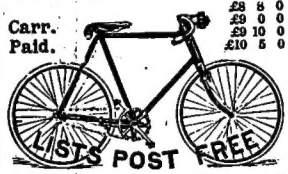

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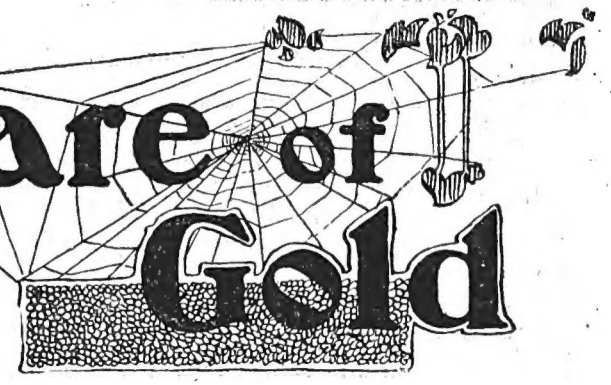
SHORT STORIES

No. 763.] Week Ending August 15th, 1903. [One Penny.

NEW SERIAL STORY. **START TO-DAY.**

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

START READING HERE.

George Geldart, the rich City merchant, awakens to find that he is lying in a coffin, wrapped in grave clothes. Fearful lest he may lose consciousness again before he properly realises his surroundings, he clambers out of the sexagon.

There are voices!—those of a man and woman. Moving by instinct, he flings aside a wardrobe door and hides within. It is his son Eric, and his adopted daughter Clare talking. From their conversation he learns that his younger son, Ronald, has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

A tap at the door! Geldart hears the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she goes from the room, and presently he hears another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, his business partner, whom he has so often befriended.

It then transpires that Eric Geldart and Blagdon have conspired to end the life of the former's father. Eric demands a price from Blagdon for recovering some of the latter's promissory notes from his father's possession—old Geldart had noticed their disappearance, and thought that he had been robbed of them by Ronald. Blagdon promises that Eric shall have his price, then they leave the room.

Geldart slips swiftly out of the wardrobe, and, taking with him various articles, deposits them in the coffin, putting the lid back in its place. Then the undertaker's men come in and screw it down.

No sooner is this done than Ronald enters the room, and his father hears him bemoaning the fact that the body is out of sight, and his heart goes out to the son he has so cruelly wronged.

Click! Once again the door is closed. Ronald is gone!

And then George Geldart leaves his hiding-place again, dons a suit and hat of tweeds, an overcoat, and a pair of boots; then, watching his opportunity, he slips downstairs and out of the great house which can never more be his home.

George Geldart is penniless! He determines to go to Ronald, but on reaching the hotel where his son was staying, he is informed that the boy has gone no one knows where. He strolls out into the streets and there sees, what is supposed to be his own funeral, pass, attended with much pomp and show. Then he feels his unutterable loneliness, and is wondering in what direction to turn his steps, when he is greeted in a hearty manner by a man called Stanyer, whom Geldart had known in his youth.

For four days Geldart has had nothing to eat or drink, and he accepts with alacrity Stanyer's invitation to dine with him. Stanyer has made a fortune in business in Australia, and wants someone to look after things in England for him. He offers the position to Geldart, and the latter, telling him nothing of what has transpired, agrees to act for him. He thinks that at last he sees an opportunity of working a pet scheme over which he had fallen out with his son Eric and Boanerges Blagdon.

After the funeral of what are supposed to be the remains of George Geldart, the great man's will is read. With the exception of a few bequests to servants and friends, everything is left to Eric. Ronald is present at the reading of the will, and there is a scene between him and Eric, the latter being accused of foul play regarding the father's dealings with the younger brother and the reason that he is disinherited.

George Geldart was offended with his second son because he did not wish to enter the City business. Eric, whose one desire is to obtain gold and power, fosters his father's ill-feeling towards Ronald. Shortly after a stormy interview with his father, Eric is visited by Blagdon, who tells him that things are going wrong, and wants to know what is to be done in the matter of telling George Geldart.

"Go upstairs and see him—say nothing," replies Eric, and with scared face Blagdon goes out of the room, leaving Eric pacing to and fro, thinking. If the doctors would! Such things had been known. If he thought his son had robbed him—and he had two sons!

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Gulf that Separates.

"Eric!"

The door opened, a girl with a pale face and sad eyes glided into the room.

"Well, Clare?" he asked impatiently.

"Eric, dear, how your face hardens, how your voice hardens when I speak to you now. Ah, me, ah, me! Haven't you a smile for me, a kind word, how grudging you men are of those things when a woman has been all ungrudging."

An impatient exclamation was on his lips, and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he suppressed it, and said:

"Clare, I am on the brink of a volcano."

"I know—I know, the deficit. Only a week from Wednesday when your father must know. Why not anticipate his discovering it and make a clean breast of it?"

"Bah, he'd turn me out of the firm, out of his house, cut me out of his will, you know he would."

"But what's the alternative?" the girl asked.

"Only one desperate step. Look here, Clare, you know he hoards money in thousands, in tens of thousands."

"Yes, it's part of the pet scheme he's been evolving for years, the system he talks about, but never tells about."

"Yes," said Eric with a bitter sneer, and he tapped his forehead. "He wants the firm to forsake its legitimate business for his harum-scarum, mad-brained folly, wants Blagdon and me to pledge ourselves to adopt it in sheer reliance on his testimony to its merits."

"But, Eric, he's very wise, a genius in these matters. Why do you thwart him?"

"You know what genius is allied to? Our concern is sound. Though Blagdon and I have gone a bit wrong in outside operations that doesn't affect the soundness of the firm; if we let the house involve itself in speculation foreign to its purpose then our sheet anchor's gone. No, no, you'll help, you must. You have access to the keys of his private safe, you must get me those keys."

"But Eric, that is treachery!"

"Clare, what is a wife's first duty, to love, honour, and—obey!"

"But I am not your wife—despite your promises!"

"You have my promises, and I will keep them. If you give earnest of your willingness to obey, get me those keys."

His will was her law. That night, when all the house was fast asleep, Clare Armitage, its adopted daughter, the confidant and amanuensis of its master, took to Eric Geldart the key of the private safe in the library towards which apartment, with cat-like tread, the pair descended. The safe duly opened, from within an inner drawer Eric lifted a roll of crisp, flimsy paper.

"The old man's hoard!" he whispered, and with eager, trembling fingers he flicked over and counted the notes.

"Eric," said Clare, "you won't keep them—all?"

"No, not all," he answered sententiously, but even as he spoke he pushed back and closed the empty drawer.

"You've taken all," she whispered, her heart reproaching her for her ingratitude towards the head of the house, impelled by her love for the elder son of it.

"As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," he answered under his breath. "It was the only way!"

"But, Eric, you are closing the safe. Why not leave it open? Can't we leave marks for forcing and wrenching, as though it had been broken open? It would be better for him to think that thieves, I mean real thieves—— Oh, God, but that's what we are—strange thieves had robbed him!"

"No, no," he answered curtly, "I have a better plan than that!" He placed a selected few in another pocket, then made his way like a thief in the night to his brother's empty room, and from the smaller batch he took certain of the notes, placing them in his brother's pocket-book, others in the drawer of a small cabinet, then he withdrew.

And Clare, following him like a shadow, just as close and just as silently, and watching every movement with horror dilated eyes, when they had left the room, whispered in anguish:

"Oh, Eric, Eric, this is too bad, too bad! I shall never look Ronald in the face again! Eric, we must undo what we have done. Oh, for the love of Heaven! While there is time!"

"No, no!" he answered. "It is too late, there is no time." For even as he spoke they heard the click of a pass key in the front door, and his brother's footstep in the hall, and on tip-toe the scoundrel and his myrmidon went their respective ways.

On the evening of the following day, George Geldart, after applying himself in his library to the abstruse calculations which had for some time past seemed to possess him, went to the safe muttering:

"Ten thousand pounds! Why, we could start it with a thousand, a hundred—the fools!"

He flung open the safe, pulled back the door, and gasped:

"Why—why—why, what's this?" Quickly he opened and shut drawer after drawer, then sank into a chair, gripping his head in his hands, and muttering, "Robbed, robbed, robbed!"

But how—by whom? He scanned the safe narrowly. There was no trace of violence, no mark of tool or implement. He reflected on whom could suspicion with any semblance of reason fall? His servants were faithful, tried and trusted. Clare, Eric, Ronald? He dismissed impatiently the thought of coupling them with the affair, even for a moment. But he was a man swift of idea, prompt of action. In the interests of the innocent themselves it was best that those least suspected should be subjected to investigation as rigid and as searching as those who haply might have been tempted.

And Eric Geldart, noting his father's preoccupation, and his strange questions, boldly challenged him, so boldly indeed that the old man blurted out the truth.

"Then," replied Eric, "it is only fitting that search should be made from the highest to the lowest. I am the eldest son of the house, I insist the search begins with me," and, despite his father's protestation of absolute reliance in his innocence, he insisted then and there, leading his father to his room, and going through every desk, trunk, drawer, and article of clothing.

And Clare, too, professing wonder at their quest, and informed as to its nature, insisted on the like inquisition. As to Ronald, "Oh, well," Eric urged, "Ronald is absent on one of his jaunts, it would hardly be fair to make a search in his absence," and his father answered, "True."

Only later on, when old Geldart, noting a book absent from the library shelves, a breach of his inexorable law, had demanded who had taken it, and had been told that Ronald once again in this respect had sinned, his father, fuming with rage, strode upstairs to his room, searching high and low for the missing book.

And in his quest, lifting the flap of Ronald's writing-desk, discovered with a cry of horror, not the missing book, but that which for a thousand-fold its value he would not have discovered there.

A moment later Ronald entered and turned a look of inquiry on his father.

"I came here," said George Geldart, "to search for a missing book, little thinking I should find here the missing money."

"Father, what do you mean?" demanded Ronald sternly.

"I mean what I say, what I see," and he pointed to the incriminating note. "Now, sir, where are the rest? Now that you are here I insist upon your room being subject to the same rigid investigation as Clare's and Eric's, with their assent, even at their own request."

"But, sir," said Ronald, "you must tell me first that you are certain. Good Heavens! Is it possible that you, my father—But there, search if you will!"

And George Geldart searched, with the result that in a drawer he found two other notes, each for a hundred pounds, in the pocket of a jacket another still, with the result that after

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a violent scene, which cost both father and son more agony than either had experienced before, the younger man went from his father's house, vowing never to look upon his father's face again until he called him back to ask his pardon.

Next day George Geldart sent for his solicitor to recast his will.

So far Eric Geldart's evil scheme was working as smoothly as could be expected. But even yet they were not all complete. A viler, crueller design he had conceived was still unaccomplished.

Another surreptitious visit, not this time to the safe, but to a cash-box in his father's escritoire, and he possessed himself of yet another roll of notes, part of that strange hoard his father had been for long accumulating.

And amongst them found, to his surprise, a slip of blue paper bearing a brick-red bill stamp.

"Hullo!" he chuckled, "Boney's been tapping the old man for fifteen hundred, I must make him redeem this at a discount."

* * * * *

George Geldart waxed enthusiastic. That was his way on one particular subject, the subject Blagdon had broached, strangely enough the very one that as a rule he shunted.

"Look here, sir," he said, rapping the table. "This is where the Americans get ahead of us. They're not so tied down by conventions. Why, in America there's scarcely a man of any eminence who hasn't been half a dozen things.

"Look at old Abe Lincoln, Stonewall Jackson, Garfield, McKinley, look at Roosevelt, writer, soldier, politician. Men out there try their hands at as many implements as come along, till they find the one that suits them best. Over here a man mustn't take a certain step because he's too young, another because he is too old; over there a man jumps just when he thinks he will, and that's when he thinks the right time has come.

"But over here"—then scorn possessed him—"I suggest to my son and my other partner a new idea in the way of business—Bah, I've no patience with them, 'It isn't in our line!' 'It's out of our groove!' and so on.

"That's the British way, we go jogging and jogging along in a circle, and then we wonder why people who are living in their own era, their own day, their own hour, leave us behind, and when I express my determination to go my own road, my son, who of course knows more than his father, hints more or less politely, that I am too old."

And so they shepherded him to the track they had in mind.

"Of course you have your own ideas," said the doctor, "you think even at your time of life you could do better in a new line than that you've worked a lifetime in?"

"I don't think at all, I know that with co-operation I could make in one year more money than I've made in all my life in produce in Mincing Lane. I have a secret, a secret so valuable that the fabled Philosopher's Stone would, if it existed, be as dross to it. I can't work it alone, or else I'd venture.

"I'd take the plunge without a moment's hesitation, and while they were toiling and moiling and scraping and screwing and grinding their tens and their hundreds out of beggarly microscopic margins, I'd glean it in, gather it in!" And the old man opened his arms as though enfolding to his heart his sheaves of golden grain.

"And your system's infallible?"

"Absolutely."

"But neither Mr. Blagdon nor your son Eric is quite insensible to commercial advantages, although your second boy is a bit of a visionary. Do they indorse your system?"

The old man hesitated. "They want to test it, but it requires no test. They want to know the secret before they buy it."

"Is that unnatural in business?"

"Not as between strangers, but between men who know each other, who trust each other——"

Suddenly he paused. Why was he launching into confidences with this man, whom, somehow, he never liked, and why was this man so inquisitive? He took up a newspaper. Blagdon and MacQuoich exchanged glances, then the latter, rising, said:

"I'll rejoin Miss Clare in the drawing-room, perhaps in my absence you will be able to bring your partner to your way of thinking."

Pushing aside the *portière* he opened the door, walked through and closed it, then opened it ajar and stood there, listening.

"I wish you wouldn't bring up business matters before third parties," said Geldart testily; "I don't care for that man, anyway, can't think why on earth he called."

"Well, I like that," said Blagdon, "seeing that you've been monopolising the conversation for the last half hour as you generally do. By Jove, Geldart, when you're in the stirrups on your Rosinante, tilting at your windmills, you're as oblivious to the rest of the world as the other Don Quixote!"

"Blagdon!" said the other, "be foolish if you must, but don't be rude."

"I was about to make the same remark."

"Mr. Blagdon, if you forget you are my guest I am bound to bear in mind I am your host."

"Yes," said the other, looking at his watch, "for a few minutes longer. Why did you send for me?"

"You know very well, I told you in my letter."

"I don't."

"I told you in my letter."

"You said, come over to my place on Sunday afternoon."

"Yes, and I added 'to arrange about your note of hand.'"

"My what?"

"Your note of hand that I mentioned in my letter."

"You didn't mention any note of hand, and I don't know what you're driving at."

Geldart passed his hand across his forehead, and Blagdon went on:

"The old man's hoard!" he whispered, fingering the notes with eager, trembling fingers.

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"Look here, my friend, take my advice, break yourself of your habit of launching out about your wonderful system, because it leads you to dream."

"Now, what the dickens do you mean? You know very well that your promissory note, days of grace and all, ran out yesterday, and I sent for you to learn what further time you wanted."

"My promissory note?"

"Yes, for fifteen hundred pounds."

"Geldart, what on earth are you dreaming about, raving about, I never gave a promissory note to any man in my life!"

"I think you're right so far, one of us is indeed raving."

He took from his pocket a bunch of keys, then crossing the room to an escritoire, unlocked and flung open a drawer, saying: "I'll show you your own handwriting, perhaps that will convince you better than your partner's word."

"Show me my note of hand for fifteen hundred pounds or any other sum given to you or any other man, and I'll redeem it within twenty-four hours and pay an equal sum to any charity you like to name."

George Geldart looked his partner for a moment in the eyes, withdrew from an open draw an envelope, tore it apart—it was empty! Snatching out the drawer he threw its contents on the desk, rummaged amongst them with trembling hands, then clenching those hands, he faced his partner.

"Gone! gone! gone! and you—you——"

"Ha! ha! ha!" the other laughed, "come, Don Quixote, once again it's only a windmill you are tilting at."

"The note you gave me isn't there, but it's been stolen as the other notes were stolen—and you know by whom—and you're in league with him—I see it all; I've been suspecting all along, but now I know."

"You know what? What do you dare to say?"

"I say that you—the man I've trusted and befriended, are a liar, a traitor, a swindler, and a thief! Ah!"

A cry bubbled up in his swelling throat, the veins stood out upon his forehead like tangled wires. He staggered, threw up his arms, spun round and with a crash fell at the feet of the false friend who had betrayed him.

"My God!" exclaimed the doctor, gliding into the room and looking in Blagdon's hang-dog face, and instantly he knelt beside the prostrate man.

"What is it? Apoplexy?" gasped the other.

"No! no! Fling up that window, stand back, give him air!" cried the doctor, swiftly unbuttoning his clothes and opening his shirt and vest, he placed his hand within that vest; then after a few seconds, with the other's help, he lifted the huge grey head a little. It fell back heavily.

"I didn't mean this," whispered Blagdon, "I didn't think I should bring on a fit."

"You haven't!" said the doctor in a low tone, looking up into the face distraught and distorted with terror, "He is dead—and you have killed him!"

FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Face in the Crowd.

Eric Geldart's chance had come.

For years he had aspired to Parliamentary honours, had figured prominently in political controversies, losing no opportunity of appearing before the public, whether in the columns of a newspaper or on the planks of a platform.

And now at last he was invited to contest the constituency of Little Claverton in the interests of the Progressive-Conservative Party, a new, small, but by no means insignificant section, composed mainly of malcontents recruited from either of the great divisions and who had by their activity and generalship recently forced themselves into prominence.

Neither side particularly liked the new party, but both were remarkably civil to it, as it was numerically strong enough to be dangerous in the event of a close division.

That was its strength, the strength it knew and unceasingly exerted, concealing its purpose until the last possible moment, and, like the guerilla band it was, harassing hosts immeasurably superior.

Outside the house the members of the new party were all things to all men, assuring the Conservative elector that the ancient institutions he prized were the especial objects of their solicitude, and the most advanced Radical that the "Pro-Con" Party, as the band of political guerillas had been dubbed, was going all the way with him, only a trifle ahead.

Principles so elastic suited Eric Geldart admirably, and having for some considerable time attached himself to the party in its operations outside St. Stephen's, he had finally been selected to contest Little Claverton in its behalf, that borough specially commending itself to the party as a likely one on account of the equality of its ultra-Tory and advanced Radical sections, as evidenced by its poll at the two previous elections.

So to Little Claverton he went, canvassed it, flooded it with addresses, stumped it, fly-posted all its available space with placards in blue and red as distinguished from the Tory candidates's which were blue, and the Radical's which were red only, and in all these and yet other ways warning the Conservative elector of the recklessness of its Radical candidate's programme, and the Radical elector of the dangerously retrograde tendencies of the Tory candidate's avowed policy.

And then he won Lord Lynton to his side. This was his master-stroke, his ace of trumps.

By a convenient fiction peers of the realm are forbidden to influence Parliamentary elections, but Lupus, fifteenth Baron Lynton, Lord of the Manor of Little Claverton, tenant in tail of Lynton Court and the magnificent estates surrounding it, and freeholder of nine-tenths of the little market town of Little Claverton, usually made his fiat and sent a good round Tory politician of crusted port wine principles to St. Stephens, and his opponent about his business.

But it had happened that Lord Lynton had quarrelled with his party. Another peer had been appointed Lord Lieutenant of the county, a position Lynton had coveted, and to express his indignation, his lordship was prepared, if necessary, to recommend his tenants to vote for the most rampant Radical whoever denounced lords and landlords.

But here was a middle course! By supporting with his influence the Progressive-Conservative candidate, he was able to deliver "a nasty one" at his whilom friends, without conferring any benefit upon his old opponents. And so it came to pass that Eric Geldart, his programme and his policy, were made right welcome at Lynton Court.

And thus it came to pass that Eric Geldart met Madeleine Lorraine. And, having met her, made a vow that he would spare no means, fair or unfair, to win her for his own.

For she was fair, and fresh, and sweet; tender as April, bright as June, so fair that she need not have despaired of a coronet, had she not been heiress to a peerage in her own right, albeit, that title was all but a barren one—her father being as poor as proud.

And Eric Geldart, who loved glitter in general and, above all, the glitter of a coronet, and the be-all and end-all of whose existence was his own advantage, said to himself, when first spell-bound he gazed on her, "If I can but win her, I must win all the rest."

And so he set to work to win his double prize; courted his electors as assiduously as he courted Madeleine, hampered in neither suits by a slavish regard for fact.

Once or twice her father prevailed upon her to occupy a seat beside the candidate whirling through the streets of the quaint old town on a motor-car gay with colours.

Impelled by the same influence she occupied with other ladies a seat upon Eric Geldart's platform, and he was glad to reflect that on that particular occasion he made his ablest speech, fenced most successfully with his hecklers, and undoubtedly made the strongest impression he had succeeded in effecting on the constituents. That meeting over, he conducted her to her carriage.

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"You excelled yourself to-night," she said, extending him her dainty hand.

He pressed it a moment in a lingering hold, and answered in a whisper, looking straight into her wonderful violet eyes, "I had such inspiration."

"Of course," she said, "the enthusiasm of the meeting."

"No," he answered, "your presence. I think, Miss Madeleine, with you to cheer me, I could win life's battle all along the line."

She paled for a moment, her fair brow knitted with a puzzled expression; then without a word, she gathered up her train, entered the carriage, and was gone.

At last the polling day arrived. Little Claverton was ablaze with bunting and excitement. Eric Geldart and his committee were here, there, and everywhere, rallying undecided voters, marshalling the faithful, rallying the wavering.

Uneasiness began to reign in the camps of the Reds and the Blues, who noted their respective colours combined too ubiquitously for their satisfaction, and then, at last, candidates, committee-men, counters, officials, and all were assembled in Little Claverton Town Hall, which was surrounded by a multitude, alternately cheering and groaning, singing party songs, yelling party cries.

At last upon that crowd there fell a hush when out on the balcony stepped Mr. Mayor, to announce that Mr. Eric Cosmo Geldart was returned Member of Parliament for Little Claverton.

A great shout went up, greater yet when the numbers were announced, the victorious candidate having polled 5,215 votes, and a greater babel than ever arose when the remaining numbers were declared, and it was found that the Progressive-Conservative majority was only a matter of fifty over that of the Radical candidate, between whom and his Conservative opponent the difference was only twenty-five.

Whirling his overcoat round he flung it full at the heads of the maddened horses.

When at last that clamour had somewhat subsided, Eric Geldart, M.P., stepped out upon the balcony to thank his supporters, to shake hands with his opponents, and to propose a vote of thanks to the returning officer.

Exultant with victory, he stood there looking down upon the sea of faces, drinking in its roar of clamour, like an intoxicating draught. Then, his gaze roving over that wide sea, there upon its fringe they rested upon a face looking up at him, as it were, out of the gloom, with a gaze of stern reproach.

And there, in the view of all, he clapped one hand on his heart, waved the other in the air, and fell back heavily in the arms of those around him, exclaiming:

"Father—father—mercy!"

SIXTH CHAPTER.

Ronald Plays the Hero.

Ronald Geldart left the house that he had once called home with his heart overflowing with gall and wormwood.

Life itself, the world around him, seemed to be all bitterness, with rampant falsehood crushing with tyrant heel the helpless truth. Yes! Bitterness filled his heart even against the father he had loved.

Up to a point there had been in his heart no bitterness, even at the end. Beside his father's coffin he had thrown himself in a tempest of tears, but that posthumous voice delivering its unjust sentence in the hard, cold phrasing of the law, had deadened all remorse, all regret, awakening anger and resentment.

His father had died unforgiving and unjust, had left him disinherited—so let it be, he had chosen not only to deprive him of his patrimony, but to leave it on record that he had done so deliberately, therefore he owed him nothing save his being—an unasked gift—owed his memory no gratitude.

He had shaken from his shoes the dust of his father's house. A sudden bitter resolve swelled in his heart, he would divest himself even of his father's name. Yes, of the name borne by Eric, Eric, who had always hated him, conspired against him, whose lifelong dread had been lest he should not gain the larger half. He had the whole now, let him keep it—all—all, he, Ronald, would not share with him even the abstract advantage of a name.

His heart was sore as well as bitter, for a man is cut to the quick when his own kith wound him, the winter wind of ingratitude is never more keen than when it blows from homeward.

No, not even the name, the only thing his father had left him, and even as to that had left him not of choice. That father had stripped him of his patrimony, the empty name he would divest himself of, his brother grudged him even that—as he grudged him a brother's share—let him take that too!

Absorbed in his meditations he strode moodily along.

"Hallo, Geldart!" a cheery acquaintance hailed him in passing. With his head bent, his hands clasped behind him, he strode along, shut his ears, his heart, to the sound of the name he had determined to abandon.

"What a black-looking brute!" said his friend's friend. "By Jove, if a chap cut me like that I should remember, and I should remember to forget him."

"You bet your life I shall," said Geldart's friend, or rather his friend no longer, "he's no loss, there are one or two very queer stories about concerning him."

"Was that his governor who died the other day?"

"Yes, and they say the cause was connected with the shock of finding that that surly brute had mixed the old man's money with his own, and yet Ronnie Geldart was once as bright and breezy as Brighton."

Meanwhile the object of the above remarks went on his way, feeling a strange, morbid satisfaction in having disowned the name of those who had disowned him. And, all of a sudden, he was awakened from his abstracted gloom by a sound of excited shouting.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" and another sound, the clatter of gallop-

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ing hoofs. Looking up he noticed everyone gazing in the same direction, many people with paling faces.

Then he noted the cabs and carriages, carts and other vehicles in the roadway pulling in sharply to either side, and away down along the vista of the street there came, careering at a mad gallop, two carriage horses, their ears back, their heads down, stretched out like the steeds of a Roman chariot in a mad stampede. They had got their bits, they were bolting!

In vain the hatless man, with a white face, leaning back on his box, strained at the reins till they were tense as wire, looking ahead with the fear of death in his white face; this time the brute beasts and not the man were masters.

And in the smart brougham there sat a slender girl, her face set and white, but rather with the dignity of a marble statue than with the pallor of a craven terror. One hand she had upon each side of the carriage, but there was nothing to be done, to leap would have been to seek not safety but certain death, and so she sat there impassive to rigidity as one who, face to face with the Grim Monster, seemed to say, "Well, then, so be it, I am ready!"

There was no time to think, barely time to act. Ronald Geldart wildly bounded into the centre of the road, threw up both his arms, but the maddened horses came on, straight at him. Swiftly he slipped his arms out of his overcoat, whirled it round, then flung it full at the heads of the bolting horses. For a moment, blinded, they swerved, that was his chance! With a wild leap he seized the offside bridle, wrenched the plunging horse aside, checked him.

The brute reared up on his hind legs, taking Ronald off his feet; there was a desperate struggle between horse and man, and the odds were on the horse. Only just at that moment one of those prosaic heroes, who, enrolled beneath the banner of Peace, aid her to win her victories no less glorious than those of War, rushed to Ronald's aid.

"Hold on, sir," shouted the constable, as he seized the nearside horse's rein and ear, "I've got this one!"

And Ronald held on. Just at that moment the brute with whom he wrestled, rearing once more on his hind legs, lost them, slipped and fell heavily with a crash, and Ronald went down under him, while a groan arose from all who saw. "Poor, brave fellow, he's killed!"

But by this time the coachman had slipped off from the box, the traces were cut, the plunging beasts secured, the one that had fallen on Ronald raised and led away. They lifted the unconscious man and carried him to an adjacent surgery.

Half an hour or so later he emerged from his swoon feeling he had been concerned in a combined earthquake and volcanic eruption, his head was bandaged, his right wrist was in splints, and he was dimly conscious of numbness and pain all over.

A fair face was bending over him—a face lighted by the most wonderful eyes into which he had ever looked, a pair of dreamy, drowning eyes, that seemed to him like sapphire lamps veiled by sweeping lashes. She who gazed upon him bent her stately, shapely little head, crowned with its wealth of red-gold hair, that framed it like a halo.

Then she rose and turned to go.

"Poor fellow," she said, "I am afraid it will be some time before he is conscious.

"Let every care be taken of him, and when he recovers ask him to send his name and address to, or call at Lorraine House. I am sure my father, Lord Lynton, would like to add his thanks to mine."

She glided from the room, attended by the doctor, who, returning, said to his assistant:

"I think he's asleep now, best leave him for a quarter of an hour or so, Nature's sweet restorer will do more for him than we can do. Wonder who he is, I don't like to ransack his pockets for papers, seems mean, we'll find out when he wakes."

The baize door closed behind them. A few minutes later Ronald Geldart rose with difficulty, resumed his overcoat, took his hat, and limped out of the room down the stairs, and out into the street.

He meant to bury his identity, he was not going to have his name bandied about in this paper and that, so that she of those sapphire eyes should learn that the man who had gone to her aid was the Ronald Geldart who rested under the shadow of an unjust ban and an unmerited suspicion.

Nevertheless, an instinct within him whispered that though a lapse of days, perhaps of hours, might efface him from her memory, her sweet presence, her graciousness, her loveliness, would be with him a happy recollection far longer.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sampson Scrimshaw, Company Promoter.

There were times when to George Geldart it seemed that his mortal life in that identity had really ceased, and that the doctrine of transmigration of consciousness of soul was being furnished with proof and instance in himself.

It was a strange, uncanny experience to be meeting in the City and elsewhere people he had known familiarly, and be passed unrecognised.

True he had to some extent disguised himself by covering his round double chin with a peaked beard, but he felt, not without a cold thrill, that even had he not done this, it was unnecessary, that even had he appeared to these people "in his habit as he lived," he would have remained unrecognised.

George Geldart to them was dead and buried.

A strange experience it was too, when taking up the *City Press* after luncheon he read an account of his funeral, together with a synopsis of his "career of usefulness and philanthropy," setting out the position he had occupied on the boards of City companies and benevolent institutions.

There was a beggar man to whom he had been good in the way of alms, cast-off clothes, and so on, and it was to George Geldart a study to observe the different expression on that man's face as he now passed him; the absence of the air of expectancy, the beaming cordiality, the effusive gratitude. To a certain extent it was healthier, for now the coppers, the only coins he could afford, were received with a condescending toleration, none the less because the truer.

One reflection consoled and sustained him. He was no longer George Geldart; in the centre of the swim, folks could not say that he owed everything of the present to his past and to the name he bore; the commercial instinct and faculty were strong within him, all the stronger and the more invigorated by virtue of his circumstances.

He had set himself to work practising with small means on a small scale the operations he had formerly carried on on a large scale, and it pleased him to prove how true were the rules of the game, how irresistible the sterling qualities which in the main go to make a successful man, and to recognise that, given time and average opportunity, he was competent to achieve, from his new standpoint, a fortune and a position quite equal to that he had left behind him in that other life.

His business arrangement with Stanyer worked without a hitch. Every week day from ten to five and till two on Saturdays, Geldart repaired to the little office on the second floor of Crosby Square, E.C., as punctually as his employer could have expected or desired had he been present to check his time.

But he was not there. By the mail after that chance interview with the friend of his youth, he had returned to Australia, leaving Geldart with little more to do than to mark the fluctuations of the Share Market, to report such occurrences as were noteworthy in connection with the same, and every now and then to attend Stanyer's brokers and give instructions as to the carrying out of various transactions.

(Another instalment next week.)

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The Power of the Past.

A Little Romance of Love and a Bygone Crime.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

PART THE FIRST.

The Past is Unveiled.

"You won't do as I wish? You won't even ask her?"

"I—I can't, dad."

The answer was given gently yet firmly. If the words were broken by a slight stammer, it was that of pity rather than indecision. The speaker—a vigorous, youthful figure, in light summer garments and a Panama hat—looked gravely at his questioner, a man short, square, middle-aged, and florid. The latter was striding erratically about a small though lofty room, whose many and regular angles, and opposing, diamond-paned windows, showed that it was one of the apartments contained in a tower of octagonal shape.

The room was handsomely decorated but somewhat bare of furniture. A big pedestal-desk, a Turkish carpet, a lounge chair or two, a smoker's table, an oaken cabinet of narrow drawers, and a heap of novels, were all that diversified the polished floor.

On the mantelpiece, under a glass shade, was a gilt and plaster model of a huge nugget, flanked by other cases with specimens of gold-bearing ore. Outside the tall, deeply-set windows blazed the hot noon of an August day, brooding over a pleasant English landscape.

The elder man halted suddenly, plunging his hands into his coat-pockets, and setting a strong jaw under a grey moustache. His eyes were hard, and his whole expression desperate and bitter in the extreme.

"Dick," he exclaimed fiercely, "you don't know what this marriage means to me, you can't. But you do know, you have known for years, that I have set my heart on you and Evelyn Hatton being man and wife. Why should you back out now, why should you set up your will against mine?"

He paused, obviously seeking to moderate his anger.

"Evelyn is pretty enough," he went on, "isn't she, and good enough, and well-educated enough? I've seen to that. I'm a rough diamond myself, but I know that a young fellow of your position and breeding wants a real, slap-up lady for a wife. Well, Evie's all that. And you like her, you've always let me see that."

"Y-yes," faltered the other, tracing the pattern of the carpet with a boot-toe.

"Then," said his father, with a return of angry desperation, "I'm not going to let you play old Harry with my plans at this time of day. You hear me, my lad? I've struggled and fought and starved—and—and other things that needn't concern you—to make my boy rich and a gentleman. I've given you your fling; you've had your college and your university and your travels. And now you've got to come to heel for once in your life and do what I tell you. And that is, ask Evelyn Hatton to marry you. You shall, as sure as my name is John Jardine."

He stepped up to his son and laid a hand on the younger man's shoulder. A nervous anxiety showed itself in his keen, masterful visage.

"Dick," he added, "you'll do it—you'll give your old dad his way for once, won't you?"

Richard Jardine turned his hat about in his fingers. "Dad," he said, "she—she doesn't love me."

His father started back.

"Pshaw!" he cried, "absurd! Of course she loves you. What girl wouldn't? You're young, good-looking, good-tempered, well-bred, and you've a rich dad—any girl is going to snap at Dick Jardine. Ask her, my boy, ask her—I'll bet you a thousand pounds to a penny she says, 'Dick, I'm yours.'"

Dick winced.

"I believe she would say 'Yes,' dad," he owned; "but it wouldn't be out of love, because—because I know she doesn't love me. Yet she would say 'Yes,' and why? Think of the obligations you have placed her under. Without their having the least claim upon you, unless being the wife and child of an old acquaintance be a claim, you rescued her and her mother from poverty, you brought them to Lazonby, you have given them for years an ample income and a home almost at your own gates. It was noble of you, dad, it was princely, but how now can she refuse to give herself to me—your son?"

"Refuse, of course she can't," said John Jardine sharply.

"I would rather she refused me," answered his son steadily, "than that she said 'Yes' out of gratitude. If she were a blood-relation of yours, like—like Hector Fane—she—she need not feel so bound by your kindness. But she does, she must feel bound, and as I know she does not love me, I cannot ask her to marry me. I am sorry, dad, but I cannot, I—I will not."

John Jardine bit his lip—so savagely that a crimson drop or two stained his large, even teeth, and his eyes flashed.

"You won't," he said, "then I have done with you. You have dealt me the deadliest blow it was in the power of any living soul to deal me. You have denied me the realisation of the one ambition for which I have lived, you have turned the happiness of my old age into dust and ashes—you, my only son! May everything you do in the future be fraught with sorrow for you; may your life be bitter and hateful to you, as you have made mine to me."

Richard Jardine shivered.

"Dad, dad, for Heaven's sake!" he cried, "you don't comprehend what you are saying. I would give my life to please you, and you know it. But I will not marry a woman who does not love me; that would be to do her a hideous and irreparable wrong, which would bring other and worse wrongs in its train."

His father took a hasty step to the door of the room and flung it wide.

"Go!" he said, and his florid face twitched as he uttered the word—"go, and never, so long as you live, let me set eyes on you again."

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The young man at whom this abrupt command was hurled, remained, as though transfixed by astonishment. Slowly a certain proud self-confidence kindled in his bearing, and, with a mute inclination of his head, he moved from the apartment.

John Jardine stood gazing after him, then, with a motion like that of a despairing woman, he wrung his hands, and an involuntary moan of uncontrollable anguish escaped him.

Covering his face with his palms, he sat down at his desk. There was something pitiable about the absolute collapse of the burly form, the quiver of the large and sinewy fingers, and the droop of the masterful grey head. Finally he drew a sibilant breath and looked up; his tanned countenance had grown strangely pale.

"My one chance," he muttered—"my one chance of happiness and peace of mind. And it is Dick who robs me of it. If I forgive him may——"

He left the sentence unfinished. The murmur of voices had reached his ears; one of them was soft yet brightly musical, the other harsher and masculine. John Jardine rose and passed out into the hall.

At the sunlit opening of the great doors a couple of horses were waiting, and the dismounted riders, a man and a woman, were crossing towards him. The woman, in her dark and trailing habit, was unmistakably young and charming, with generous brown eyes, smooth braids of brown hair, and a delicate, proud little profile.

Her companion was fair—almost colourlessly fair; his moustache and hair were ashen in their fairness. Pale blue eyes, dazzling teeth, and a secretive, half-cynical smile, it was of these that anyone who saw Hector Fane carried away an abiding recollection. On the whole, he was a handsome, if a selfish type, and his smart riding-clothes showed a well-knit, indolent frame.

John Jardine's glance went past him to the figure in the sweeping black gown.

"So you have had your ride, Evelyn," he said awkwardly.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Jardine," he was told; "but we—we missed you and Dick. Have you quite finished talking this wonderful 'business'?"

She spoke with a gay simplicity that yet had a vague embarrassment in it.

John Jardine avoided her gaze.

"Quite," he said, "with Dick. But now I want a word with you. Hector will excuse us, I am sure."

Hector Fane assented politely. "Oh, certainly," he declared, and turned away with easy nonchalance as Evelyn Hatton passed into the curiously-shaped room on whose threshold John Jardine had been standing. The latter followed her, and the door closed.

A low whistle stole from Hector Fane's lips, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"What does that mean?" he demanded, under his breath. "Dick stays in all morning to talk 'business,' and then my precious uncle wants a word with her. We—we must make certain."

His slow, cynical smile flickered over his features, and he strolled off. His destination was a large, book-lined room, that opened from the hall a few yards away.

Hector Fane entered it loungingly, shut himself in, drew a chair to the great writing-table, and took a sheet of paper and a pen. He trifled with them for a minute, then laid them down, and springing up, went to a heavy door on the further side of the library. Massive as it seemed, it gave access to nothing more than a deep cupboard.

Hector Fane stepped into it; it—like the library—was lined with books, but smaller and more valuable ones. A gleam of light was visible at the back. There was a second door to it. Hector Fane pressed close to this and leant down.

Only the thickness of a few painted planks separated him from the octagonal room that was John Jardine's "den." Thanks to that fact and a favouring keyhole, he could see and hear almost all that was passing. The quickness with which he took up his position of vantage suggested that he was not occupying it for the first time.

John Jardine, he perceived, was standing at the oaken cabinet of drawers. Hard by, in the lounge-chair, her hands—in their leather riding-gauntlets—trifling with her whip, sat Evelyn Hatton. While the unsuspected eavesdropper peered and listened, John Jardine turned and came across the room, a folded document of some sort in his grasp.

"Evie," he said, and his voice shook a little, "I must call you that once more, as I hoped, in the end, to have the right to call you. But when you have heard what I am going to tell you, you will hate to think that I ever called you by a pet name, that I ever touched your hand."

Evelyn Hatton looked up at him astonished and startled. John Jardine motioned to the paper in his fingers.

"It's all written down here," he continued; "it was signed and witnessed years ago. And yet I hoped that no eyes but mine would ever see it; I hoped to be able to burn it on your wedding-day. I have lived in that hope, and now the hope is taken from me."

He unfolded the paper, and refolded it again.

"I'd rather tell it you," he said. "Listen! Ten years ago I, John Jardine, became famous, as everybody knows, by reason of having discovered the great Piko Hill gold mine. It's a lie, I didn't discover it, your father, David Hatton, did."

John Jardine made a quick gesture; an expression of horror had blanched Evelyn Hatton's face.

"Don't, my lass, don't," he begged, "it's not as bad as that. I did him no bodily harm, thank Heaven. He was dying when I found him. Oh, yes, I told you and your mother the truth when I said I had known your father, and when I told you that he must be dead, I was telling you what, alas, I knew to be true."

He paused. Hector Fane, crouching in his recess, had displaced an unsteadily poised book; the volume made a muffled sound in falling. John Jardine hesitated an instant at the noise, then, satisfied of its unimportance, went on.

"Your father was a clever geologist. He had found the Pike Hill Reef, worked out the main dip of it, and bought up, in a false name, a lot of shallow claims above it. On his way to the coast to raise capital for sinking his shafts he was attacked, robbed, and badly wounded. He died in my arms, died of his injuries, blessing me for having promised to secure to you your rights in his discovery, which he had confided to me, after binding me to fidelity with a terrible oath."

Evelyn Hatton rose involuntarily. John Jardine fumbled with the document he held.

"That oath I broke," he pursued, wretchedly, "I—I had had shocking bad luck myself up till then, and—and I wanted to be rich for Dick's sake. I stole your father's claims—*your* claims—and worked them as my own. It was in getting down on to the reef I found the famous Jardine nugget."

He pointed to the plaster model on the mantelpiece.

"That's all there is to say," he added. "I am rich with your money. I am a low, mean thief, a thief who has stolen from the widow and the orphan. I have hated myself for it always. If I could have persuaded Dick to marry you you need never have known, that's what I've lived in hopes of."

The unseen listener, kneeling in the dark with an ear and an eye alternately to the keyhole of the double-doored cupboard, frowned thoughtfully. Evelyn Hatton had bowed her head and was blushing a tremulous rosy-red.

"But it wasn't to be," said John Jardine. "I laid my commands on the lad, and he defies me—his own father!—to my face; won't ask you at any price, because you love someone else, and he knows it. So my plan's busted, and I can't make things right as I had counted on being able to do, without betraying myself. That's why I've turned to and told you the truth."

Evelyn Hatton's brown head drooped lower and lower.

"Does—does Dick know?" she asked.

"No," answered John Jardine drily, "not why I wanted him to marry you."

The gauntleted hands plucked at the lash of the riding-switch.

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"I'm—I'm so glad," faltered its owner nervously. She looked up quickly. "Mr. Jardine," she said, "I—I suppose you did very wrong. But you—you were thinking about Dick, weren't you, and you really gave us all we needed, mother and I. And you—you were kind to father when he was dying. So please keep the money, and don't say a word to Dick."

John Jardine gasped. "I couldn't do that," he told her. "You've got to have the money back, and as Dick won't carry out my plan of getting it back to you and keeping it for himself at the same time, we'll have to take the straight road. There were only those two ways for it."

Evelyn made an imperious little gesture.

"Please," she said, "I won't let you speak another word about it. Let everything be as it is at present. I'm sure it's best; it—it would be very, very, very, cruel to tell mother after all these years. I wish you'd never told me."

She checked herself on the point of holding out her hand. Somehow she could not quite be with him as of old, not all at once.

"Mr. Fane will be waiting to ride home with me," she remarked, "please let me run away and forget that you ever said what you have said."

John Jardine stood silent, irresolute. She studied him, lingering.

"I'm so glad Dick doesn't know," she said, "so glad and thankful—remember, you mustn't tell him, ever."

John Jardine did not answer, he had turned to put back the "confession" in the drawer of the oaken cabinet. Hector Fane could see his every motion—the drawer was the third one down, and he was locking it with a key that hung on the free end of his watchchain, where it was thrust into his right-hand vest-pocket.

"You will promise not to tell Dick," said Evelyn, still lingering. "He—he loves you so much it would nearly kill him."

John Jardine seemed to fail suddenly where he stood. He did not answer, but Evelyn thought that he shook his head slightly.

"There, that's sensible!" she exclaimed, "and now I must run away. Mr. Fane will be getting impatient. Good-bye for this morning." And she went towards the door, but glanced back to say, "Oh, I do wish you hadn't told me."

Hector Fane saw and heard no more; he had risen from his crouching position, emerged from the recess, and was already gliding out of the library. His uncle saw him meet Evelyn Hatton in the hall; another moment and there came to his ear the sound of their horses' feet as they rode off together. Then he rang the bell.

"Ask Mr. Richard to be kind enough to come here," he ordered the servant gruffly. The footman went on the indicated errand.

"Mr. Richard is not in the house, sir," he returned to report. "His man is busy packing some things. He is to meet Mr. Richard at Lazonby in time for the noon express."

His master leant heavily on the desk. John Jardine hesitated, alternate waves of anger and alarm flitting across his florid features. Finally he consulted his watch.

"Oh, very well!" he said. "Have me Deerfoot saddled—at once." The footman bowed and hurried off, puzzled by his master's demeanour. John Jardine covered his face for an instant.

"Heaven forgive me," he muttered, "my own boy!" He shivered and set his teeth. "I must tell him all," he said, "and then—then we will go away together and begin life again."

With another glance at his watch, he hastened out to the stables to mount his favourite horse and ride sharply down the avenue from Lazonby Court, the fine country seat where he had spent so many guilty years.

There was plenty of time to meet the noon express at Lazonby station, and he drew rein as he passed out of the avenue on to the high road. He had almost overtaken Evelyn and her cavalier, they were riding in front of him, their horses close together, the riders almost knee to knee, John Jardine started and a groan burst from his lips. Evelyn had leant over still closer to her companion.

"The lad's right," he said; "it is not he she loves. Blind, blind, not to see what he meant. Hector! Great Heaven, that—that puppy to cut out my brave, my gallant lad!"

He sat on his horse, staring at the two till they rounded a bend. If he could only have known that, earlier in the morning, as they walked their horses under the shade of the chestnuts which bordered the long high road, Hector Fane had proposed to Evelyn Hatton and had been—rejected.

PART THE SECOND.

The Past is Defeated.

"You—you're not angry with me, Hector?"

Unconscious of the eyes that, from the foot of the avenue they had just left, watched her graceful gesture, Evelyn Hatton bent over in her saddle to look into the face of Hector Fane. He had scarcely spoken since they left the Court. Nor did he answer now.

"Hector," added his companion gently, "we have grown up together, you and I—and Dick. You won't let my having had to say 'No' make any difference? You will still let us be good friends?"

Hector Fane roused himself from his own thoughts.

"Of course, since you wish it," he replied, and turned his head as if to conceal a spasm of emotion. But his blue eyes were cold and thoughtful.

In reality he was wondering what move he should take in the strange game of living chess that lay before him. Hector

He was locking the drawer with the key that hung on his watch-chain.

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Fane was very shrewd and selfish, he had been pondering the problem coolly.

Some hour or so before, he had proposed to the woman at his side—because—because she was beautiful and his uncle's *protégée*, sure, he knew, of a handsome dowry. Now he had learnt that she was rich in her own right, and that John Jardine, his own kinsman, was a criminal.

To Hector Fane himself, John Jardine had been a veritable fairy god-father. He had gone through a great university with Richard Jardine, and John Jardine had footed the bills. And his pay as a subaltern in the fine regiment to which he belonged was supplemented by a generous allowance from his uncle, who entertained his nephew and that person's regimental friends sumptuously and often.

But of late Hector had displayed a preference for coming to Lazonby Court alone, and no little of his time had been spent at the Hermitage, the pretty modern bungalow residence in which, almost at the gates of the Court, John Jardine had installed Evelyn Hatton and her mother.

These visits had culminated in a proposal and—a refusal, a refusal that had piqued Hector's pride and self-interest more than it had hurt his heart. To that pique the powerful instinct of cupidity had now been added, for Hector Fane was both poor and extravagant.

Eavesdropping is not common among officers and gentlemen, but for years Hector Fane had cherished the idea of supplanting Richard Jardine in the affection of his choleric father, and had shrunk from nothing to keep himself intimately acquainted with the state of affairs between them. Hence his familiarity with the recess in the library that formed a kind of "car" to his uncle's "den."

And now, in the light of his extraordinary discovery, he had been asking himself what was his best—that is to say, his most profitable line of action. At the moment when Evelyn, rousing from her own reverie, addressed him so pleadingly, he had come to a decision. He turned and met her glance with an admirable assumption of deep feeling.

"I know you care for me more than I deserve," he added, "and I cannot bear to lose whatever of love you choose to give me. Some day, perhaps——"

He had begun upon a diplomatic sentence, intended to suggest that he had not quite abandoned the hope of winning a further portion of her love. But the remark was interrupted, and by the *teuf-teuf* of a motor-horn. A huge yellow motor-car shot past them as they drew sharply to the near side of the road. A second later, a riderless horse dashed by at the headlong gallop of uncontrollable terror.

Evelyn cried out. "That was Deerfoot, Mr. Jardine's hunter," she said, "and saddled. What can have happened? We left Mr. Jardine in his room. Who can have been riding the horse—not—not Dick?"

White to the lips, she turned her mare and started back along the road at a gallop. Hector followed her, a terrible hope in his heart that the thrown rider might prove to be his cousin injured, dying. For he had read the meaning of Evelyn's blanched cheeks and trembling lips, he knew now why she had rejected him. She loved Richard Jardine.

The mare was fleeter than his cob—by the time he had caught up with his companion, Evelyn had dismounted and was kneeling at the wayside, by a frightfully still and crumpled figure. He sprang down, and, as he did so, recognised in the stalwart form, and grey head his uncle, John Jardine.

While they bent over him, seeking in vain to evoke some sign of life, the horn of the motor-car was heard again. Its occupants had caught the frightened horse and were returning. They alighted, horrified at the catastrophe.

"A doctor! Go for a doctor!" Evelyn adjured them. The leather-clad *chauffeur* leapt into the car and went off like the wind. His passengers, anxious and pitiful, gathered round the prostrate man.

For five minutes John Jardine neither moved nor spoke. Then his eyes opened and his right hand, stealing to the free end of his watch-chain, pulled out the little key.

"Evie," he murmured.

Evelyn bent over him.

"Yes, yes," she said.

John Jardine pushed the key into her hand.

"Take it—it off," he faltered.

She obeyed. Hector Fane, standing by, watched, coldly and keenly.

"The—the old horse has—has done for me," gasped the injured man. "I can feel it. But you'll—the paper—it will right you. The third drawer in my cabinet."

"Hush, please, please, hush!" she whispered.

He moved his head restlessly.

"Dick," he said, "my—my boy—forgive—for——" He drifted into unconsciousness again. Evelyn's tears fell fast.

"Will the doctor never come?" she sobbed. The motor-horn answered her, and the car sped up. Someone sat by the *chauffeur*—a clever young Lazonby surgeon, picked up as he was entering his own gate. Quietly he came and knelt down by the injured man.

When he looked up his face was grave. But he said nothing, only ordered a gate to be taken from its hinges and himself helped to lift his patient on to it. When the bearers of the rough ambulance moved off the young surgeon walked by it.

Hector Fane drew level with him. "I am his nephew," he said; "is there any—any danger?"

The young surgeon answered him with an ominous directness. "I cannot," he was told gravely, "say that there is any hope."

Hector bent his head assentingly and stepped back. He put Evelyn on her mare and led his own cob. Nor did it escape him that Evelyn's now ungloved fingers were closed upon some object other than her reins—the key that John Jardine had given her.

The surgeon was piloting his ambulance-bearers past the avenue which led to the Court.

"I am taking him to my house," he said to Hector Fane; "it is nearer and better. He may not recover consciousness, if there is anyone who ought to see him——"

The warning was left significantly unfinished. Evelyn drew rein.

"Dick!" she exclaimed, a world of pity in her tones. "I will go and bring him." And she shook her mare into a gallop and darted up the avenue.

Hector Fane's eyes flashed, and, as the surgeon moved on with the sad little procession, he himself sprang to his saddle and galloped after her. She was going to his rival, and, moreover, she held a tiny key—the key of the dying man's past.

Fast as he rode, she was there before him—she had hurled her mare across fence and lawn.

"Mr. Richard was leaving for London by the noon express," the footman told her, when she had leapt down and hurried into the hall, "his man has gone over to the station with his bag. We understand that Mr. Jardine has gone over to the station too."

Evelyn looked at her watch, it was past noon already, but she turned back to her mare. A thought crossed her mind—the key in her hand. John Jardine was dying, and his honour—his and Dick's—lay in a drawer in the octagonal room.

"I—I will write a telegram," she said, "your master has met with a bad accident." And cutting short the footman's ejaculations, she went into John Jardine's "den."

She pushed the door to, to shield her movements. It had a spring lock and clicked smartly as she stepped across the room to open the third drawer in the oaken cabinet. A sheet of paper lay on the top of its other contents; she recognised it in an instant, and snatched it up. She was about to pocket it, then recollected that there was no pocket in her habit, and that besides, the paper was dangerous in the extreme. It could only be rendered harmless by destruction.

A box of matches—on the smoker's table by the desk—caught her eye. She seized it, struck one, and lit a corner of the paper. As it blazed she heard Hector Fane's voice at the door, and knew that he must have followed her. She

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thrust the drawer to and stood irresolute, yet bent upon the burning of the paper.

Suddenly, to her amazement, a panel of the door was dashed in, a hand was inserted, the spring latch withdrawn, and Hector Fane, with an oath, flung himself upon her. The paper, half consumed, fluttered to her feet.

She wrenched herself free from the grasp in which he held her, for he was beside himself with futile rage; the footman, incredulous and stupefied, peered in at the shattered door.

"Hector!" she cried, "how dare you—are you mad?"

"Mad!" he repeated, snatching up the paper and beating out the flame, "not I—let them laugh that win. I knew what you wanted to come back here for with the key he gave you. I knew—I know everything."

Evelyn clutched at the charred yet still dangerous document, but he flung her off. Then suddenly he too was gripped—by the neck—the paper he held was taken from him and delivered to Evelyn, and he himself was pitched ignominiously into a corner of the room. Richard Jardine had entered unperceived.

Ill news travels fast. He had heard at the station of his father's accident, and by a natural misapprehension had returned at breakneck speed to the home he had believed left behind him for ever. Nor could he have made his appearance at a more opportune moment.

The rest of the paper was burnt after all, for Evelyn completed that process at her leisure. But Dick had to learn its purport, for the wretched Hector blurted out so much of the truth—though not, luckily, before Richard Jardine had hustled from the room the interested footman and several more of the Court domestics—that the secret could not be hidden from him.

Yet good came out of evil, for Dick was not so dense as not to perceive the significance of Evelyn's ardent self-sacrifice. Moreover, her attitude towards Hector Fane was effectual in removing from Richard's mind a fixed, though quite unwarranted idea that she was in love with that unpleasant person.

John Jardine did not die—the young surgeon, though of a pessimistic disposition, performed an important operation of the first magnitude, and, to his great professional advancement, it proved successful. But Evelyn will have it that his patient's recovery was really due to the fact that one night, in the temporary absence of the nurse, she whispered to him that Dick and she were *engaged*.

As for Mr. Hector Fane's knowledge of a certain secret, a smart lawyer took him in hand and bullied him into a withdrawal and an apology. And John Jardine still treats him generously, though he will never consent to see him. Even now no one is quite sure how he found out the secret in question.

R. Norman Silver.

DEAR LOVE.

The Tale of a Misunderstanding.

It was entirely Alan Rothbury's own fault that he was, as he put it, a wanderer on the face of the earth. In confidential moments he would add that it was "a woman's doing." As a matter of fact, it was his temper that was to blame.

Alan had what his nurse used to call a "nasty" temper, a jealous, passionate, utterly unreasonable temper.

In nursery days he had been known to throw his bread and milk at his sister, because their nurse had put an extra spoonful of sugar into the basin of that chubby and much-enduring little person.

And after the little sister grew up and had a husband and children and a house out Hampstead way, Alan continued to throw things at her, figuratively speaking, if she did not make enough of him when he came to visit her, or if the children were not sufficiently enthusiastic in their welcome of Uncle Alan.

"How I wish Alan were married!" sighed Mrs. Harwood one evening, as her brother bounced out of the room in a temper.

"Yes," agreed her husband. "Then he'd stay at home and not come bothering us with his temper."

"Alan has a good heart, dear," said Alan's sister reproachfully.

"And a beastly temper. Oh, yes, I know he's a good fellow, Winnie, dear, but he's so jealous and unreasonable, and has such wonderful ideas of what *Mrs. Rothbury* must be, that he'll never find a girl to suit him."

"Carmela Gordon might," observed Winnie. "I shall ask her to dinner to-morrow."

Alan was great on the attributes of woman in all relations of life, but especially as wife, and more especially as *his* wife.

Most men fall in love first, and think of suitability afterwards, but Alan first carefully considered Carmela Gordon's fitness for the post of Mrs. Rothbury, and then, being satisfied, fell in—no, majestically walked into love with her.

There were many things in women to which Alan objected, but Carmela emerged, triumphantly from every test. Bicycling, Alan considered unwomanly, and Carmela did not cycle; golf was unwomanly, and Carmela played no out-of-door games. Sewing, music, and gardening were womanly pursuits, and Carmela was an exquisite needlewoman, a brilliant pianiste, and an enthusiastic gardener.

Her personal appearance was exactly what Alan most admired. She was tall; Alan was rather under medium height. She was dark; Alan's hair and moustache were auburn—in boyhood's sunny hours he had been known to his schoolfellows as Ginger or Carrots.

Carmela was stately, dignified, and reserved; Alan quick, talkative, and demonstrative.

Carmela's voice was charming, her enunciation unusually clear and somewhat measured. Alan was genuinely attached to this stately lady, and admired her dignity and reserve, though it fretted him that she did not unbend to him, even after they were formally engaged.

Carmela was motherless, and lived with her father, whose only child she was, in a large, old-fashioned house, standing in its own grounds, not far from where the Harwoods lived. She was generally to be found among her flowers when Alan came to see her on the long, sweet, summer evenings during their engagement.

The wedding day was still some six weeks off, when one evening, after having written to postpone his visit to his betrothed, he changed his mind, and went on the wings of love and in a hansom to The Elms, the not very uncommon name of Carmela's home.

Learning that she was, as usual, in the rose garden, Alan went quickly down the broad walk, and was turning into the garden when voices from the summer-house on his right arrested him. It was a man who was speaking as Alan paused, but the next moment Carmela's musical voice rang out, clear and distinct.

"Oh, you must not desert me. I could not do without you, dear love."

Alan stood rooted to the spot. Was this his Carmela, his proud, undemonstrative Carmela? She had never called *him* dear love, never even dear Alan.

The man's voice came again, but it was too low pitched for Alan to distinguish the words.

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"Yes, of course, but my marriage will make no difference," came Carmela's slow, sweet tones, each word distinct. "Indeed it will give me more freedom. You know there have been many difficulties here, but when I am in my own house I can arrange matters as I like. You must promise me to come—do, dear love."

Rigid with horror, Alan turned away. He would not reproach the traitress, he would have no scene; he would simply go away. So without a word of explanation to anyone, and leaving an address with his solicitors, coupled with instructions to give it to no one else, and to forward none but business letters, Alan disappeared.

For five years he roamed about, shooting big game, and telling casual acquaintances that he was a lone exile, a wanderer on the face of the earth, and that it was all a woman's doing.

But at the end of five years he got tired of this amusement, and resolved to go home to see what changes had taken place there. Perhaps Carmela might be a widow, and he would rejoice in her sorrow.

Very much astonished, but very pleased, was little Mrs. Harwood when her erratic brother walked in just in time for dinner one lovely June evening, five years almost to a day after his disappearance.

Not a question was put as to his reasons for his eccentric behaviour, for Winnie and her husband knew Alan's temper too well to venture on unpleasant topics, and it was not until dinner was over, and they were sitting out on the verandah, that Carmela Gordon was mentioned.

"And how is Carmela?" asked Alan, quite coolly, but busy over his cigar, which wouldn't draw.

"I'm surprised at you, Alan," said Winnie, with sudden stiffness. "After the way you treated Carmela you ought to be ashamed to speak of her."

"Ah, you don't know the reason of my conduct," said Alan grimly.

"Nor does Carmela," retorted his sister.

"She does. Her conscience must have told her."

"Well, it hasn't. I don't care what you say, Alan, or what excuse you have, but you behaved like a brute and a cad to that poor girl. And Ralph thinks the same. Don't you, Ralph?"

Harwood nodded an emphatic assent.

"You don't understand," said Alan, getting up and beginning to march up and down, "and I can't explain. She's married, I suppose?"

"Who?"

"Carmela."

"Married? Why, of course not."

"Not married. Then why isn't she?" demanded Alan, indignantly.

"Probably because the only man she ever loved ran away from her a few weeks before the wedding. And now she's too busy earning her living to think of marriage."

Alan sat down suddenly.

"Working for a living? Carmela? Winnie, what do you mean?"

"Why, Mr. Gordon died two years ago, leaving nothing but the house, which was his own property, and a few hundreds in ready money. Carmela let the house to a lady who takes boarders, and boards there herself, but she kept the grounds, and has started a nursery garden, which is just beginning to pay."

"She was always fond of gardening," put in Ralph Harwood.

"Yes," went on his wife. "She and that old gardener of hers were two enthusiasts. Her father used to object to their experiments, and she used to tell me she'd try new ones at Rothbury Hall after her marriage, if only she could persuade Dearlove to leave Hampstead and go with her."

"Persuade *who?*" almost screamed Alan.

"Why, Dearlove, the gardener. What's the matter, Alan?"

"I didn't know that was his name," murmured Alan, faintly.

"Didn't you? You might have heard it often enough, I should think. It's not a very uncommon name, but it's ludicrously inappropriate to that funny old man. How pale you are, Alan!"

"I don't feel well," stammered her brother. "I'll have a turn in the open air. No, don't come, Ralph. I'd rather be alone."

Without conscious volition he found himself presently hastening along the road towards Carmela's house.

"Fool, fool that I was," he muttered to himself, "to rush off in a fury without asking an explanation. Why, of course the poor darling was only trying to persuade the crusty old fellow to follow her to Rothbury Hall.

"Oh, why, *why* has he such an idiotic name? It was that which drove me mad. Her coaxing voice, the endearing names she never used to me. Oh, how it cut me to the heart to hear them lavished, as I thought, on another fellow."

He had reached the gates of "The Elms" now, and stood looking wistfully in, like the Peri at the gates of Paradise. All was unchanged, so far as he could see, except for the board announcing the sale of fruit, flowers, and vegetables within.

Alan could not resist the impulse to enter, and did so just as Carmela turned out of the path by the summer-house, and paused there, talking to the old gardener who followed her. As Alan advanced, she saw him, and her face froze. White to the lips, but dignified as ever, she stood awaiting his approach.

"Dearlove," she said to the gardener, "attend to this gentleman, and learn his business."

With a little frigid bow she turned to go, but Alan caught her hand.

"Carmela, I intreat you, let me speak. I only ask five minutes alone with you. In mercy, in justice, hear me."

Silently she led the way into the summer-house, where, five years ago, she had held that fateful interview with her gardener. Without a word she stood waiting for Alan to speak.

"Carmela, I thought you had betrayed me," he began. "I thought you were unfaithful to me, that is why I deserted you. Five years ago I came down unexpectedly, and heard you talking in this very summer-house with a man whom you were imploring not to desert you, as your marriage would only give you more freedom, and whom you were calling dear love. I thought he was your lover."

"And how have you been undeceived?" she asked, disdainfully, frozen pride on every feature.

"To-night my sister chanced to mention your gardener's name, and it all flashed on me. I know now you were trying to persuade him to follow you to Rothbury Hall, but the words were open to another interpretation, and I was misled by that fatal name."

"And treated me so cruelly that I shall never forgive you," said Carmela, icily.

"I know you can't. But I was mad. I had so often tried to get you to respond to my endearments, to call me "love" or dearest," and you never would. I put it down to reserve, and loved you the more, but now I thought the true explanation was that you did not love me, and had a secret lover."

"You might at least have asked an explanation. I shall never forgive you," the girl repeated.

"I know. I behaved atrociously. I don't expect you to forgive me. I can't forgive myself. But I've suffered, Carmela, I've suffered terribly. I went away loving you; I spent five years loving and longing for you; I've come back loving you more than ever, and knowing that my own hand has shut the gates of Paradise upon me.

"I'll go now, but I had to tell you that I know what a fool and brute I've been, and that—that I love you more than ever now I've lost you, and you hate—hate and despise me. But, oh, Carmela, Carmela——" his voice broke, and he stopped with something very like a sob.

Carmela came a step nearer. The pride and coldness melted out of her face. Her soft crimson lips parted with a smile of exquisite tenderness, her great dark eyes brimmed with tears of loving pity; her hands went out to him in sudden surrender, and as he snatched her to his heart, she murmured, "Alan, dear love!"

Vera Serkoff.

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"An' Go to Yer Gawd Like a Soldier."

—*Kipling.*

The Story of a Man's Self-Sacrifice and a Woman's Love.

The little frontier town of San Carlos was simmering with excitement, for the threatened invasion of Mexico was to become an accomplished fact. From every township in Texas the hardy adventurers rolled up to the gathering place, until four hundred of the best fighters in the world were waiting the word "advance."

Scallywags and desperados, good men and bad men, all were equally fired by the *Wanderlust* and by the thoughts of the lovely Eldorado away beyond. Only the women repined, as they have always done when fathers and lovers, husbands and brothers, ride away into the unknown.

To Grace Thatcher, the belle of San Carlos, the expedition was a hateful thing. Far and wide the rough frontiersmen owed her allegiance for her beauty and courage, and not a man but would have laid down his life for her. And now, just when she had narrowed her choice of admirers down to two, it was cruelly hard to have to rush a decision upon which so much depended.

William Wallace was the most suitable, of that there was no doubt; but he was forty, and already in his black hair silver streaks showed thick traces of early hardships. Money was his and much cattle, but—his rival was young. All the world loved Len Hurst, a lad of barely twenty, and from whose face the down of boyhood had scarcely passed. They loved him for his pluck and for his merry laugh, which rang out like an inspiriting bugle in the strangest of places.

It was the night before the start of the invaders, and Grace was feeding her chickens just as she had done since she was a child. There was a soft flush on her cheek and a smile of happiness on her face which ought to have warned Wallace, as from the gate he devoured her with his eyes.

Of love hitherto he had been ignorant with the ignorance of the hardy mountaineers, whose life is full from morning until evening, and now every fibre of his body thrilled with passion. He hardly dared to breathe lest she should be startled by his sudden appearance, but her instinct warned her, and she turned and saw him.

A lovely colour stole over her face, a blush the man in his folly thought was for him, and his speech became thick and his tongue dry as he stammered out the burning words. As she listened she grew pale and her eyes filled with tears, for she knew now what mischief she had done, but it was too late!

"Tell me, Grace—I'm a plain man, my dear one—tell me when I come back from this expedition you will be my wife."

He looked down at her from his lofty height, and judged her shrinking demeanour to be but maidenly timidity. His tones were almost triumphant as he exclaimed:

"I won't press you, little girl, for an answer now, but I'm going a happy man."

"Listen," she cried desperately, "it's all a mistake. I'm sorry, but——"

She hesitated, with a half fearful upward glance at his face which grew set and stern.

"But what?" he insisted.

"I'm engaged to another man!"

Her voice could scarcely be heard, for she was sore afraid. She could see the strong man tremble and the sweat stand on his forehead, as he heard his sentence and tried to keep down the storm of fury which ran in his veins like molten lead.

"Who is it?" he muttered.

"Len Hurst," he heard whispered, "and I love him. William Wallace, if anything befalls him I'll never marry anyone—you hear?" she cried, fearful lest his anger, now so sternly repressed, should fall on her young lover. "Why did you love me? Would God I could make you happy, but I can't," she wailed.

Wallace said never a word, but he wrung her hand until she could have screamed, and then turned and tramped off to his hut. All that is bad in man's nature tormented him that night, until with the bugle call came a temporary peace. In the hurry and bustle of that *reveillé* his brain was at rest, and it was not until the straggling column had moved off and was trailing down the road that his anguish returned.

Secure in their dreams of victory the men of Texas marched along without one military precaution, each man in the position that seemed best to him. Day by day Wallace's temptation to put a bullet through his rival became stronger and stronger until it grew insupportable. Now the column had crossed the ill-defined frontier, and no enemy had yet appeared.

Not one of the devoted band realised that along the heights above the crafty Mexican soldiers were stalking their prey, waiting until the ground made their success certain. Had Wallace been himself he would have remedied all this, but his one hope now was revenge.

One night Hurst, who found that his old friend was avoiding him, plucked up courage to make the first advance.

"Will," he said, holding out his hand, "it was the fortune of war that I won her. Don't bear me malice."

"I hate you," said the elder man. "I never loved but her, and now my life is empty. You'll have to fight me for her, though, for by the Eternal I'll not stand by and see you marry her. You must take your rifle directly we come to the camping ground, and at a hundred paces let the best man win. What, are you a coward, too?"

Before the lad could speak a pattering rifle-fire began to search out the unwieldly string of men. They had penetrated into a long defile, and were slouching along at its foot, without an advanced guard or one precaution to prevent a surprise. Nothing but a few puffs of smoke to the right, left, and front betrayed the presence of anything unusual, but the rapidly falling men showed how straight was the aim of the hidden enemy.

The column broke into helpless disorder, for with its head checked and the rear crowding in, the task of defence became absolutely impossible. Firing wildly in every direction, the tried hunters, the trained frontiersmen, yielded to ungovernable panic, and became quite unmanageable. Then, as his comrades fell thick around him, Wallace, who alone kept

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some control over himself, took out his handkerchief, and tying it to his ramrod waved it high above his head. The others saw it and copied his action, at the same time laying down their guns and shouting wildly.

Then from behind every rock and shrub appeared the Mexican troops, and swarmed down amongst the invaders. Helpless and still sick with panic the men allowed their hands to be tied and their weapons removed, whilst with every taunting cry and speech the Mexicans heaped opprobrium upon them.

Sullenly the prisoners were driven from the defile and the dead and dying left to their fate. Wallace, by the accident of chance, followed close behind Hurst, and a grim smile curled his lip as he realised that in all probability the question of right to the girl they both loved had been solved for them.

After a weary tramp of eight miles the dispirited men reached the Mexican camp, and were driven like cattle into a small corral having a low adobe wall, some five feet high, round it.

"Well, Wallace, won't you forgive me now?" said Hurst. "After all, we both love her as true men, don't we?"

The elder tried to turn away, but his heart failed him, and half furtively and wholly ashamed at his weakness, he took the proffered hand.

"I fear, lad, that we'll never leave this pen alive," he said after a bit; "these brutes have no pity. Hullo, what's that?"

As he was speaking a squad of Mexican officers came into the corral, preceded by a soldier carrying an earthen jar, which he deposited upon the wall.

"Now, my friends," said the senior officer, a vicious-looking half-breed, in a shrill, penetrating voice, "you came into our country uninvited, and every fourth man of you must stay in it for ever. I have here in this carafe enough white beans for three out of every four of you, and enough black ones for the others. The men that draw black beans will fall in on the right end of the corral, those that have the luck to draw white ones will go to the left. You understand, dearest friends, that the black bean means death in ten minutes."

A low hum sounded from the crowd, the only sign they gave of tension or of fear. The momentary panic had passed away, and each man was ready to look death in the face without a tremor.

"Fall in!" roared the officer, and silently the invaders fell in, for what was for many their last parade on earth.

Then with fiendish slowness the beans were covered with a cloth, and one or two of the Mexicans tried the fatal lottery, laughing heartily when they drew one of the symbols of death.

"Attention!"

Everyone drew his breath and nerved himself for the ordeal. One by one the men advanced and thrust their hands into the vessel, whilst the officers jeered at any sign of hesitation.

"Take your time, my child; don't hurry yourself, for it really *is* important," laughed the senior officer whenever he thought he saw any of them showing fear. But the natural dread of the drawing once overcome, no tremor disgraced the Texans, and even their enemies grunted their approval. The march to the right was as steady as the march to the left, although Death waited on the one side and Hope on the other.

By a freak of fortune Hurst and Wallace were the last to draw, and it was the youth's turn before his senior. As the man before him took his hand out with a bean of the fatal colour in it he looked stupidly up as though hardly conscious of what he was saying, and cried:

"You brutes, you might have told us that the black bean was bigger than the white."

His words were heard all over the corral, and a lump rose in many a man's throat as he looked over at Hurst's sunny face and head as he stood waiting his turn. Everyone knew that Jake Bennet loved the boy, and had warned him at risk of instant death. They were sorry for Wallace, but his taciturn manner had repelled most of the warm-hearted frontiersmen.

"Strike the cur to the ground!" shouted the officer. "But, no, stop, this is as good as a play," he added, smiling sourly. "See, gentlemen, there are but two beans left, and as my friend who is about to die remarks, the black one *is* the bigger. Now, my dear friends, choose. It is your turn first, my son; pray come and choose."

A low hiss sounded, but the Mexican took no notice, but watched Hurst's face with a cruel smile. All caught their breath, for they saw the lad's cruel dilemma when it was too late. To draw blindly was but the fate of everyone, but to draw knowingly would be sheer murder, and they waited.

Paler and paler grew the youth's face.

"Suppose I do not draw?" he asked.

"Then you both die," was the terse reply.

"Draw my lad!" said Wallace, all his soul up in arms against this treachery. "I freely forgive you. Remember the girl we both love, and draw!"

"Forgive me, Will, but I cannot. I'd rather die with you."

"And Grace?" Wallace whispered.

"Better to die with you than in dishonour after you," Hurst whispered back, and then, without another word, he took his friend by the arm and walked to the right.

No one broke the silence, for even the human wolf in command felt some trace of admiration.

"Clear the corral of the prisoners on the left, and secure them on the other side of the camp!"

The order given was quickly obeyed, and in a few minutes only those doomed to die were left.

Then the shuddering men tethered like sheep away in the Mexican camp heard the sound of volley after volley ringing up from the corral, and they tried in vain to stop their ears to keep out the sound. One thing they knew which was some comfort, however slight, that not a man begged for mercy, but that each one died fronting his foe like a soldier should.

* * * * *

The other day an aged woman, whose calm, peaceful face had brought comfort to many an aching heart, was laid in her grave in San Carlos, and the legend that they carved upon her headstone was a quaint, albeit a sad one.

"Here lies Grace Thatcher, spinster.

"Born—1824. Died Oct. 3rd, 1902.

"She was the affianced wife of Leonard Hurst and the affectionate friend of William Wallace, who were both murdered by the Mexican troops on August 15th, 1842."

Frederick G. Engelbach.

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LAST LIST NEXT WEEK.

Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*

And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." One more list will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

ELEVENTH LIST.

121. AABDLLNORST .....
122. AADEELLNPRSW .....
123. EGHINNOORSST .....
124. ABCDEELLNOP .....
125. AAAEIMNPRSST .....
126. ACEEHNNOOSTW .....
127. ADEFLMORST .....
128. BEEIGLLLLSTU .....
129. BCEEGILOPRS .....
130. AEHHLOSTTWY .....
131. ACEEFGKLNOR .....
132. ADEFIMNOORRU .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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Powerful New Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

EPISODES ONE, TWO, & THREE.

Though my real name is not Olive Beresford, I am calling myself that for the purpose of these confessions. An aunt had left me an income of £150 a year, and just as I was wondering how I should occupy my time, I received a letter from Annabel Vernon, an old school-friend, who was now married, to come and spend the week at Vernon Towers.

I was delighted to accept the invitation, and arrived on the Friday evening, being met by Mr. Vernon at the station. The house party consisted of a Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Taskot and Mr. Dean Fisher, who was an expert Bridge player.

After dinner, a Mr. Bainbrig and his sister, near neighbours of the Vernons, arrived, and Bridge was proposed. Miss Bainbrig and I were novices at the game, and Mr. Fisher undertook to teach us how to play, Mr. Taskot making the fourth at our table. We played for a penny a game—at least, that was what I understood penny points to mean—and I congratulated myself that my partner and I were doing very well. The scores were not added up that evening, so I did not know exactly how matters stood.

On the Saturday morning I got up early and went for a walk, during which I met Mr. Taskot, who told me that he had lost heavily the previous night after the ladies had retired.

That same evening we played Bridge again, and when the scores were added up Annabel told me that my losses amounted to £11 7s. 10d., and that I was fortunate to have come off so well.

"£11 7s. 10d.!" I almost screamed. "Annabel, you are making a frightful mistake! It isn't possible! I've only played for a penny a game!"

"Penny points, dear. That means a penny for every point, and sometimes you have been hundreds of points below your opponents in one rubber."

"But I've helped to win several rubbers, so I must have cleared on those games what I lost on the others."

"On the contrary, even when you won the rubber, your opponents had big scores above the bridge, which left your score nowhere. But, as I said before, you have lost remarkably little for a novice, and £11 7s. 10d. means very little to you."

"Very little!" I groaned, sinking into the nearest chair, for my limbs were trembling under me, and I felt as if I should faint, so great was my surprise and horror at the information just given me. "Very little. Why, it means ruin!"

EPISODE FOUR.
In an Awkward Fix.

It was astoundingly incredible that I should have gambled and lost to such an extent, and I might well feel overwhelmed at the information which Annabel had given me so smilingly. But my discomfiture only seemed to amaze my friend, who burst into a merry laugh, and exclaimed:

"Good gracious, Olive, one would think a great misfortune had befallen you! Fancy taking a trifling loss like that so much to heart! But I suppose you are not quite used to having plenty of money of your own, or you wouldn't be so afraid of parting with it."

These remarks struck me as being both coarse and unfeeling, and as I felt incapable of bandying words with anybody just then, I turned swiftly away, and ran up to my own room.

There I threw myself on the bed, and gave way to a flood of tears, these being none the less bitter because of the dawning conviction that I had been deliberately deceived concerning the real possibilities of the game I had learnt with such delight.

That there was a vast difference between playing for a penny a game and penny points, I was not too stupid to grasp. But I still could not understand how it was that I could be such a heavy loser when I had been congratulated more than once upon my phenomenal luck in winning so many games, and it suddenly occurred to me that Annabel must have accidentally mixed up my score with somebody else's.

Fired with this idea I looked at my watch and concluded that it was not too late to go downstairs again, and interview Mr. Fisher, whose duty it had been to add up the scores. So in a few minutes, I had bathed my face to remove the traces of tears, smoothed my ruffled hair, and was speeding down to the drawing-room when I met Mr. Taskot.

I must have been terribly upset, for I no sooner saw the look of concern he bent upon me than I was completely overcome, and, bowing my head on my hands, wept in sheer despair.

"My dear Miss Beresford," exclaimed Mr. Taskot. "Whatever is the matter? Have you fallen and sprained your ankle? Or are you ill?"

Hastily brushing the tears from my face, and rising from the stair on which I had sunk in my childish abandon of grief, I tried to summon self-possession to my aid again.

"No, no!" I cried hurriedly. "It is nothing but foolishness on my part."

"And you are not hurt?"

"No."

"Then that is all right. Anything else can be remedied very quickly, I hope. You won't think me impertinent if I ask you to favour me with your confidence?"

This was said so kindly, and with such an entire freedom from the familiarity which I had resented before, that I forgot my previous displeasure and blurted out the truth.

"I am in a serious dilemma," I sobbed. "Those dreadful games of Bridge! I've lost ever so much money over them, and I don't know how I shall pay it."

"Is that all? If I understand aright, your losses only amount to a few pounds, which will really be of no consequence to a young lady of means. But, of course, it is rather annoying to make such a poor show at the game."

"But that isn't it. I am not a young lady of means. I am quite poor, and if anybody has thought differently, it is not my fault. So it is a serious calamity for me."

"And you are not an heiress, as the Vernons have announced? H'm! That alters things a little, and I, for one

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feel ashamed of myself for doing my best to add to your losses. But, look here, won't you let me lend you the money, Miss Beresford? It would mean nothing out of my pocket."

But this apparently simple way out of the difficulty did not appeal to me, after all, for it did not seem nice to put myself under such a great obligation to a man whom I had only known for such a short time, and I stammered out something to that effect, but without disconcerting Mr. Taskot.

"Of course, it wouldn't do," he said, "and it was stupid of me to mention it. But I've a fine plan which will settle the whole affair beautifully, without putting you under an obligation to anybody. In fact, it's as simple as A.B.C."

At this assurance I brightened up considerably, and was thanking Mr. Taskot for his friendliness, when we heard sounds of laughter and closing doors.

"I say," whispered Mr. Taskot, "the others are breaking up for the night, and they might think it odd if they saw us talking together yet. I'll tell you all about my little plan in the morning at half-past seven, where the bluebells grow. Meanwhile, rest comfortably in the conviction that you have been making a mountain out of a molehill, and that the molehill will soon be cleared away."

With these words Mr. Taskot disappeared, and I hastened to reach my own room, before anybody else should see me.

EPISODE FIVE.

A Dangerous Remedy.

In spite of Mr. Taskot's optimistic assurances, I spent an almost sleepless night, and it was a very heavy-eyed girl who took an early matutinal ramble towards the coppice in which the bluebells were still growing, although the season was now late for them.

Half a dozen times had I almost resolved not to risk this meeting. And half a dozen times had I told myself that Mr. Taskot's offer of help was prompted by sheer generosity of heart which would not involve any compromise of principle on my part. But, whatever my variability of mood and opinions had been, the net result was that my hopes rose high as I neared the rendezvous, and I was very glad to see that Mr. Taskot was there before me.

He approached me with an air of deference which he did not show yesterday morning, and all remnants of incipient distrust left me when I looked at the pleasant face he bent towards me.

"It is kind of you to be so punctual," he said smilingly. "I was afraid I had mentioned much too early an hour for you."

"Nay," was my tremulous reply, "it is you who are kind. For is it not to free me from a dilemma that you are out so early yourself?"

"That is only partly true, Miss Beresford, for I am always a sort of hybrid early bird. Sometimes I get up with the lark. Sometimes I go to bed when he rises. Anyhow, he and I see a good deal of each other."

A laugh concluded the sentence, and, somewhat to my own surprise, I found myself laughing merrily in unison.

"And now for the great business which brings us hither," he went on. "Suppose you sit down on this tree stump while you tell me all there is to tell?"

Obedient to the invitation, I used the tree stump for a seat, and, noticing that Mr. Taskot held his cigarette-case in his hand, I suggested that he should indulge in a smoke. He promptly availed himself of the permission to smoke in my company, and now that we were both at our ease, there was no more beating about the bush.

"Now then, Miss Beresford, for the exact amount, please."

"Eleven pounds, seven shillings, and tenpence."

I looked nervously at my interrogator when I answered his question, for, after all, my misfortune might seem ridiculously small considered from his point of view. But, if he thought me stupidly fussy over an insignificant sum, he was very clever at hiding his real feelings, for his demeanour was the essence of respectful sympathy.

"And you don't see your way clear to pay just yet?"

"Not at present, certainly. This debt represents about one third of a quarter's income for me, and I have already nearly exhausted the current quarter's in preparing for this visit, which I thought ——"

"You fancied it was dictated by pure friendship, and you find that your old school-friend merely wanted to fleece you."

"Oh, Mr. Taskot! Surely that is speaking rather too strongly?"

"Not a bit! These people thought you were an heiress, and they actually plume themselves on having let you down lightly, for fear you would run away too soon. Never mind how I know this. Suffice it that it is absolutely true. But they will be hoist by their own petard, and you and I will pay them back in their own coin."

"How?"

"Easily. Last night, after you retired, I was persuaded to try another rubber. Of course I lost, and I believe I am altogether about four hundred pounds out of pocket so far. That, however, does not matter. What I am concerned about is to punish this gang of swindlers. I had already heard something about their methods, and was not prepared to think too highly of any of Mrs. Vernon's bosom friends."

"Then that explains your manner to me yesterday morning."

"If there was anything exceptional in it, perhaps it does. However, to continue. Having, as I have already hinted, some inkling of what to expect, I have been unceasingly on the alert, and I made an important discovery last night."

"Do you mean that the Vernons are not quite honest?"

"Don't ask me to particularise too closely. Suffice it that I know how to circumvent them, provided I am assisted by a partner who will second my exertions. I have some loss to make good. So have you. And we are both to be victimised still further, if our hosts can manage it."

"The only safe way to avoid that is to refuse to play again with them."

"On the contrary, the best way to do is to recover our money by using the same tactics that they use, in which case it is fair game either way."

"I cannot in any case risk losing more, when I have not even paid what I have already lost."

"No. You must allow me to disburse the amount for you. You will win it back to-morrow, and will be able to repay me without having to draw upon your own resources."

I demurred to this proposal at first, but eventually, seeing no other immediate way out of my difficulty, I accepted the loan. Then Mr. Taskot confided to me an elaborate series of signals which were to be exchanged between us when next we played against Mr. and Mrs. Vernon, or their friend, Mr. Fisher.

"Of course it is only against those three persons that we will thus defend ourselves," concluded my newly-constituted adviser. "Anybody else who may visit the Towers

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will no doubt play fairly, but nobody would blame us for doing to our opponents exactly what they are doing to us."

When the matter was put like that, it seemed to me that Mr. Taskot's contention was quite right, and that there could be no harm in playing at "Diamond cut Diamond."

Besides, I bore no little resentment towards the woman who had only invited me here to fleece me, and I determined to let her discover that I was not quite so simple as she imagined me to be.

By the time I had arrived at this conclusion the morning was much further advanced, and we began to retrace our steps towards the Towers. I had gathered a few bluebells, partly because I never could resist wild flowers, and partly because they would serve as an excuse for my early ramble if I should chance to meet anybody I knew.

Nevertheless, I had forgotten the likelihood of being seen in Mr. Taskot's company while still so far from the Towers, and I felt my face flush scarlet when we came face to face with Mrs. Grainger, whom I had not credited with energy enough to be out so soon.

"Good morning, both!" she said, and I fancied there was more than the suspicion of a sneer in her voice. "Good morning! Fancy being out before me! I am going to early service, but I suppose it is of no use hoping for company?"

I blushed with mortification at the meaning glance with which Mrs. Grainger pointed the last remark. She meant to imply that Mr. Taskot was an admirer of mine—a favoured one too—whereas it was purely a business matter which had brought us together this morning.

I had intended to traverse the latter half of the homeward way alone. But of course this precaution against gossip was now useless, for Mrs. Grainger was certain to mention the meeting, and I was by no means reassured by the complacent smile with which Mr. Taskot met the situation.

However, the mischief was done now, and I had ample time during the remainder of the day to wonder whether or not I had acted wisely in accepting the help of a comparative stranger.

The Vernons made a great point of going to church in the forenoon. But, later in the day, they did not hesitate to amuse themselves in their usual manner. I was invited a few times to join in a game, but was not to be persuaded to so far forget my training as to gamble on a Sunday.

EPISODE SIX.
The Deed of a Hero.

I was greatly excited at the prospect of the revenge which Mr. Taskot had planned. It seemed such a fair way of recovering our losses, when it was quite evident that what we were going to do was merely a repetition of what our unscrupulous hosts were doing, and I no longer doubted that by the time my visit was ended I should be altogether out of debt. This in itself, to one brought up as I had been, was an enormous consideration. But I had another reason for being glad that I was to have another chance of playing.

The game fascinated me, and if I had been as rich as the other guests at the Towers, I should have wanted to play Bridge all day long, for I still did not realise that Bridge can be a ruinous game even for a millionaire. A run of bad luck, on heavy points, will make an inroad upon any income.

"I wish they were not playing to-day," was my discontented reflection. "It is frightfully tantalising to watch one exciting game after another. I know what I will do; I will go out for a walk, away from it all."

"Too goody-goody to enjoy a harmless game of cards," laughed Annabel, when she saw me dressed ready for outdoors; "but not too goody-goody to have walks with gentlemen on a Sunday! Ah, well! everyone to his own taste! For my own part, give me a quiet rubber, in preference to a promenade in the blazing sun."

I was vexed, horribly vexed at this vulgar sneer. But I did not choose to make matters worse by arguing the point. So I ran hastily through the hall and down the front steps, followed by a merry peal of laughter from the victorious Annabel.

"That hateful Mrs. Grainger has been making the most of what she saw this morning," I told myself. "But I don't care; to-morrow shall see things on a different footing, and when I go home to-morrow night, or Tuesday morning, Annabel shall find that *I* am the one who can most afford to laugh over this business."

I had no inclination to go gathering bluebells again, for, somehow, the neighbourhood in which they grew seemed to be inseparably connected with Mr. Taskot, and I mechanically walked towards a picturesque village which nestled on the hillside to the left of Vernon Towers.

But, somehow, the beauty of Nature had lost its glamour for me, and I could do little else but ponder over Annabel's duplicity, and upon the code of signals which was to help Mr. Taskot and myself to baffle the swindlers.

How long I sauntered aimlessly I cannot say. But my thoughts were suddenly attracted to my surroundings by a most frightful turmoil, which grew louder every moment.

Shouts and shrieks, and the running of many feet, seemed to be the principal elements of the commotion, though I could not see what caused it, for the shady lane which I had entered took a sharp turn a little distance ahead, which completely hid from my view anything that was happening further away.

But I could discern that the disturbance was rapidly coming my way, and it was all so wildly out of keeping with the calmness of a Sabbath afternoon in the heart of the country that I paused in quickly growing alarm.

"Whatever can it be?" was my affrighted thought. "Only something dreadful can account for all that shrieking; and it is coming nearer every second!"

In a perfect panic I looked for a way of escape from the approaching danger, but could see none. The lane was bordered by high banks on either side, both of which were topped by thick thorn fences, and overgrown by prickly furze. The banks were too steep for me to scale quickly. If I ran forward, I should meet the horror; if I tried to run away from it, it would overtake me in two seconds!

The result was that I was stupefied and stood stock still in the middle of the road, being too paralysed with dread to move even when a huge, rabid dog, with bloodshot eyes and lolling tongue, came galloping straight towards me, hounded on by a foolish mob of villagers, armed with sticks, stones, scythes, and anything else that they could use for their own defence if the tortured animal should turn upon them.

But he did not offer to turn upon them. Instead of that he came rushing like the wind to where I stood, unable to move or scream, and I had shut my fainting eyes upon the awful spectacle when I felt myself suddenly grasped by the shoulder from above, and somebody gifted with herculean strength lifted me right up into the midst of the furze bushes, just as the mad dog was within a foot of me.

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"Thank Heaven!" was the exclamation I heard, and, looking up at my preserver, I saw the handsomest young man I had ever seen in my life.

"Oh, however shall I thank you!" I said. "You have saved me from an awful death!"

Both the dog and the crowd were soon out of sight, leaving me shuddering convulsively, and even my preserver was still shaking with excitement. But composure soon returned to him, and after helping me down into the lane again, he suggested that I should permit him to see me home.

"My name is Maurice Ray," he said. "I am staying a short time in the neighbourhood. May I know to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"

"My name is Olive Beresford, and I am staying at Vernon Towers just now."

"Vernon Towers? Oh!"

I felt my face flush scarlet at the emphasis which Mr. Ray put into this exclamation. The Vernons must have a very bad reputation indeed if Mr. Ray's attitude was anything to go by, and I was glad when we reached the Towers, for it was very humiliating to feel that I was being treated to a share of the contempt which was felt for my hosts.

I did not invite Mr. Ray to enter the house with me, for I hardly felt myself justified in doing that. Nor did I think he would have accepted such an invitation. So we parted at the big gates without any prospect of seeing each other again.

Fate, however, had ordained that Maurice Ray was to be a great factor in the moulding of my future destiny, though when I re-entered the house I studiously avoided mentioning him or my adventure, for I guessed that either of them would have afforded food for amusement to Annabel, and I did not want her to have more amusement at my expense than I could help.

On the Monday morning I felt no worse for my exciting adventure, and sat down very cheerfully to take my "revenge," as per Mr. Taskot's arrangement.

Perhaps Annabel, quite pleased, and thoroughly deceived by the readiness and cheerfulnes with which I paid my "debts of honour," would not have smiled so complacently as she did, if she had known of the compact that had been made between my partner and myself.

Yet her awakening was nothing to what lay in store for me. Misled by the specious arguments of an unscrupulous man, and fascinated by the attractions of an exciting game, I had allowed myself to be placed in an equivocal position, and was even now tottering on the brink of moral, physical, and social ruin.

Alas! shall I ever forget the dire results of the play that was to have recovered the money I had already lost!

(A very dramatic situation is described in next Tuesday's instalment.)

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AT ALL BOOKSELLERS

Your Editor Chats.

NEW readers will be able to pick up the thread of our new serial story, "THE SNARE OF GOLD," from the comprehensive summary of the first instalment, which is published on the first page of the paper. I hope that everyone who did not commence this story last week will do so now. The working out of the destiny of a man who is supposed to be dead is an especially attractive subject, and this is the most striking feature of the plot of Mr. Johnson's story.

A FURTHER long instalment of "THE BRIDGE OF RUIN," or the Confessions of a Girl Gambler, begins on page 208. The writer of the Confessions relates a very thrilling experience this week—an adventure with a mad dog, from which she is rescued just in time. Further developments in the gambling episode also take place, making the instalment one of more than ordinary interest. For the benefit of those readers who did not read last week's instalment a summary containing its most important features is published on page 208.

NEXT week the twelfth and last list in the Juggled Letters Competition will appear, together with the date by which all the attempts must reach this office.

THE following is the order of popularity in which readers regard the stories published in the issue of *Short Stories* dated July 25th: "Red Poppies," "The Face at the Window," "The Making of a Match," "A Horrible Honeymoon," "Nearly a Tragedy," "Barbara's Choice," "A Breach of Confidence," "In the Whispering Gallery," "Metcalf's Boomerang." No reader managed to get the order exactly correct, but the postcard containing the list in the order most nearly approaching the correct one was sent by Mr. W. G. Potter, 57 St. Mary Street, Woolwich, to whom the gold-plated pencil-case offered in this competition has been awarded.

AUGUST is hastening on apace, and with it the summer weather is going. There must be many readers who have not yet sent along their contributions to the FRESH AIR FUND, and these I would ask to delay no longer before remitting what they can afford.

In case anyone has omitted to read what I have previously written about the good work this fund does, I would say for their benefit that the object of the FUND is to give as many poor children as possible one day in the country every year.

Ninepence is all it costs to give one child a full day's enjoyment, together with a plentiful supply of wholesome food, and I am sure that anyone who realises the good derived from just this one day's outing will waste no more time before sending his or her contribution. Amounts of all sizes will be gratefully accepted, and should be sent to the Hon. Sec., FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. They will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*.

Your Editor.

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The Cooling.

Telling of How a Blunder Awakened Love.

He was late, as usual. Their appointment was thirty-five minutes overdue when from her look-out at the parlour window she espied him turning into the street from the main road.

She looked in vain for the least sign of hurry on him. Calmly and leisurely, he sauntered up the street, reading the evening paper; with the air of a man who would as lief his destination were farther, and she felt his feet trampling on her heart.

As he neared the door she slipped up to her room, and left the rest of the family, who were taking a rather indignant interest in him just now, to answer his knock. Twenty minutes after she dried her eyes and came down. He was lounging on the sofa, reading his paper.

He looked up casually.

She said: "Oh, don't let me disturb you. I'm sorry to intrude."

He looked at his watch and smiled drily.

"Rather a good job I was a little late."

"Were you? How time flies! I was late home from business, and I've been busy since."

"I've been waiting twenty minutes and a half, and I was thirty-five minutes behind," he said off-handedly.

Not by a second would he add to his waiting, or lessen his dalliance. She had lied that he might lie, but he did not care enough to take the chance. Her hand trembled as she stood at the mirror pinning up a stray lock that she had left loose so that she might seem unready.

"I could have waited until you had finished your toilet," he said.

"I forgot. Of course you want to get on with your reading. But perhaps one paper won't last you the night." She went out and returned with an armful of newspapers, which she slammed down on the table at his elbow. "There!" she said, and vanished.

He read on for five minutes or so, then he put his paper into his pocket and sat thinking in the gathering dusk. He had known Amy Minton four years. In this familiar little room, with her by his side, the happiest hours of his life had been spent. And now—it had come to this.

He did not altogether understand it. She was still young and pretty; men admired her in the street, and he knew she loved him. He supposed the cause was in himself.

He was twenty-three when he fell in love with her. He had changed a good deal in these four years. Many things that interested him then did not interest him now.

A year ago he would have quarrelled with anyone who had told him he would ever break an appointment with her. He had been doing that for months. The press of her fingers, the touch of her lips, thrilled him no more. He came to her with lagging feet; he left her with a sigh of relief. Some day—he would not come. But he did not understand it.

It was almost dark when she came back. She paused for a moment on the threshold of the room, hoping he would call her to him; then she sat down at the piano.

Time was when the commonest barrel organ melody played by her could set his heart throbbing. Now, he observed that her choice of airs was conventional, her playing mechanical and colourless. His indifference choked her. She got up suddenly in the middle of a tune.

"You'd better go," she said.

He went.

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays were the nights he visited her. The following Wednesday he did not come. The family made a fuss about it.

"It all comes of leaving you girls to yourselves," said her mother. "In my young days, when parents had a say in their children's affairs, the man was brought to his senses after a year or two's courtship, and the girl was safely married to him before he had time to get tired of her. If my mother hadn't taken your father in hand he'd have hung on till I married someone else out of spite, and left him to die of landladies' cooking."

"If that's what Amy's up to," said Maggie, her elder and plainer sister, "she might let us know, and the fellow too. Save us wasting suppers on him and him useless journeys."

"Don't you make any error," said Samuel Minton, aged eleven. "Our Amy hasn't got any other chap. She's just dotty on Walter. You should see the face on her when he's late getting here. You'd think she was going to be executed."

"If I have no one else," said Amy, for she knew that Maggie knew she had no other sweetheart, "it's because I want no one else, and not for lack of chances."

"Chances are little use when there's no sense to make use of them," returned Maggie, who, after three months' skilful courtship, was about to marry a middle-aged greengrocer.

"There's sense and sense," said Amy quietly.

"Something must certainly be done," decided Mrs. Minton. "Walter's been coming after you four years; you're no nearer the holy altar now than ever you were, and he's backing out."

"He's backing out, is he?" cried sturdy Jack, just home after five years' sailoring and wandering over the earth. "He's throwing over my little Amy, is he? We'll have to show him the way to back in again!" He squared his shoulders and performed significant manœuvres with his fists.

Amy's eyes flashed. "If you dare!" she threatened; for Jack was half as heavy again as her dilatory lover and twice as muscular.

Jack caught his despondent sister round the waist and gave her a smacking kiss.

"There then, naughty Jack sha'n't harm a hair of her darling's head," he assured her, adding, when she had gone up to bed, "But naughty Jack will make a picture of his face!"

"If you take my advice," put in Sam, "you'll let him go, and good riddance to him. He's got dreadfully stingy lately. I haven't seen the colour of his money for three weeks. I wish Amy would hook on to Benny Bingo, the bookmaker. I had it from him personally that he's clean gone on her. There's the fellow for a brother-in-law."

Mrs. Minton cut short a catalogue of Benny Bingo's liberalities by taking Sam by the collar and carrying him off to bed, to his intense indignation.

"You don't mean," she said, coming back and fastening the kitchen door, so that her words would not reach Amy's room, "you don't mean you're going to fight Walter?"

"You've guessed it, mother."

"But, my dear boy, suppose he fights you too?"

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"*Him* fight!" said Maggie contemptuously.

"All the more fun," laughed Jack.

"Leave this little job to me," said Mr. Minton, waking up out of a doze. "I'll reason with the young man. I'll point out to him the injudiciousness of his behaviour. Reason brought me up to the scratch. Why shouldn't it bring him too?"

"Because men are different nowadays," answered Maggie feelingly.

"Mag's right," said Jack. "It takes the young to deal with the young these times. You leave him to me, dad. It isn't reasoning he's in need of. He wants waking up; he's taking us too casually. Next time he calls get Amy out of the way, and leave me to settle with him. Seems to me I've just come home in time."

"What if he doesn't mean to come again?" suggested Maggie.

"Oh, then I'll begin calling on *him*."

The next night, Walter, strolling homewards, found himself in the neighbourhood of the Minton's house. He loitered awhile at the end of the street considering. He had sometimes found more pleasure in visiting Amy on surprise occasions than on the evenings when he was expected. The uncertainty of finding her in had sharpened the edge of anticipation. Without any definite intention he turned his steps towards her door.

The parlour was alight, and the blinds drawn. The piano was tinkling; a voice—her voice—was singing "Annie Laurie." The moving strains beat appealingly against Walter's heart, but it was closed against them.

The embers of his romance, which anticipation had warmed for a moment, grew cold again in her presence. The certainty that he had only to knock at the door to meet the same tentative smile with which she always greeted his unannounced visits, only to remain silent for a minute in her company to see the smile give way to the usual pout, oppressed him with the burden of disillusionment.

In there she sat, her arms ready for his embrace, her lips pleading for his kisses; and he stayed outside. But he was not happy.

He was turning away when a man's voice joined in the song. A heavy baritone, not without a musical ring, but in its bounding, unmodulated strength more suited to a rollicking sea-song than a pathetic ballad.

Walter paused, wondering who the man could be. Evidently a friend of some intimacy to be shut up in the parlour with her. And why not? She was young and good-looking, he was cooling; what more likely than that she should seek a livelier companion?

He grew hot at the question. Then he laughed with a sense of relief. Of course the Mintons were holding one of their frequent parties. Amy was singing with one of the company for the entertainment of the rest. Presently there would be applause.

The singing ceased, but there was no applause. Listening at the window, Walter noticed a gap in the venetian blind, through which a narrow space of the lamp-lit room was visible. This narrow space was occupied by part of the keyboard of the piano, a book of music standing above, Amy's profile and a large brown hand resting on her shoulder.

As Walter peered in the brown hand moved forward to turn the leaves of the music book, met Amy's white one outstretched on the same errand, and squeezed it; and the next moment a man's brown face came into view and kissed her full on the mouth.

Walter stared hard, but a mist blotted the scene from his gaze.

When it cleared away the man's head had disappeared, though his hand still remained on Amy's shoulder, and the loving pair were singing the opening bars of "Tom Bowling."

A blind rage took hold of Walter. Passionate jealousy, to which he had long been a stranger, swept over his heart as a flood, reminding him in a flash of the old days before he was sure of her favour, when he cherished black hate for every man her wayward lips smiled on.

The harmony of the blending voices maddened his nerves. He wrenched his eyes from the window, strode awkwardly to the step, and had taken the knocker in his hand, when the door, which was slightly ajar, swung wide at his touch.

He rushed along the passage and into the parlour, and seizing Amy's companion by the collar, struck him a sounding blow on the cheek-bone.

Jack Minton—for the unknown rival was he—jerked his neck free and returned the blow with interest. With loud breathings and flaming faces the two men closed in combat and went lurching about the room, hitting now at each other, now the unsatisfactory air, and all in deadly silence.

Amy shrank trembling into a corner as they stumbled towards her, then indignation against her brother got the better of her. She sprang between them.

"Jack, for shame! Come away this minute. How dare you strike him!"

The men fell apart, glaring.

"Why shouldn't I?" growled Jack. "He hit me first."

She looked wonderingly at Walter.

"You hit him first?"

"Yes," he said.

"Why?"

"He—he kissed you."

"He kissed me! Of course he kissed me." Then her heart leapt at the blunder; the dear, delightful blunder that had shown her he would fight for her, dawned on her. "I

"Jack, for shame. How dare you strike him!"

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forgot," she said, smiling on them both, "you have never met Jack, this is Walter; Walter, this is my brother Jack."

"Your brother!" said Walter slowly, thinking it out. He offered his hand to Jack. "Then I apologise."

"I'm dashed if I do!" said Jack. "So you're Walter, are you? You're the gentleman who's been having a game with my sister?" He advanced threateningly. "We've finished too soon. I've been saving up a licking for you. Better get the job over."

"Yes, we'd better get the job over," said Walter, putting up his fists.

Amy gave Jack a push towards the door. "Go and find room in the kitchen, you great silly," she said, kissing him. "And if ever you lay a finger on Walter again, I'll fall out with you."

Walter followed Jack, and held out his hand again. "Shake hands, old chap. You owed me a licking, and you've given me one, I owe you—well, never mind what I owe you. Shake hands, anyway."

Jack, slower than his sister to grasp the meaning of Walter's "He kissed you!" took his hand dubiously. "Well," he said, "I don't mind telling you that this just about gets over me. Here I come home from the other side of the world, find you two at loggerheads, and promise myself I'm going to show you how to appreciate a girl like Amy with the business end of my knuckles.

"I do so"—he inspected Walter's black eye with critical satisfaction, then felt his own bruised cheek tenderly—"we both do so. And now you're old-chapping me, Amy's chucking me out, and the pair of you seem to have become as big friends as ever without giving me the wink as to how you've managed it."

Walter shook his hand warmly. "Perhaps some other time I'll give you—the wink."

"Walter," said Amy, when her brother had gone, "what is it you owe Jack?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her in the old sweet way.

"I owe him you," he said. "I was losing you, my darling, letting you go, wilfully; though I was miserable, and did not want to. I was too sure of you, took you too much for granted. I had forgotten that I loved you. Something had to happen to remind me. Jack happened."

"But," she protested slyly, "it was only Jack after all. Are you sure you won't be sorry you put yourself to the inconvenience of calling, and—er—got your eye blacked, for a mere brother?"

"Sorry!" he cried. "Dear old Jack has been the salvation of me; but for him I would have driven you to warmer arms. My love for you had gone asleep; he awakened it. When I left you last night I did not intend to come back. Now I have come back for ever; I mean, for as long as I am welcome."

"It's all the same," she said, laying her head on his shoulder.

William James.

A LUCKY BLUNDER.

Telling of How the Mixing of Two Letters Won a Man his Wife.

The postman tossed a half dozen letters on Russell Webster's desk and passed along. Russell dropped the morning paper and picked up the letters. He hurried through the inclosures until he reached the last one. Then he raised the heavy white envelope and looked hard at the dainty address.

He was still staring at it as he ripped off the end of the envelope and drew out the sheet within. Half a moment later he softly whistled. The letter began—

"Sir,—*Your extraordinary communication is to hand. I can think of no reason that could possibly prompt the declaration you have made. I do not look upon you even as a friend. What you ask is simply impossible, and I beg you will never allude to the matter again. Yours very truly,*

"Cicely Hammond."

A smile suddenly spread across the attractive face of the reader.

"Well," he murmured, "that's a decidedly peculiar way in which to answer a simple offer for a piece of property. Hanged if it isn't serious enough to be the refusal of a proposal of marriage. By Jove, that's exactly what it is! Is anything the matter with me? Have I been proposing to some indignant maiden unawares? Where's my letter-book?" He found the volume and turned back the flimsy pages. "Here it is," he murmured, and read the copy aloud—

"*Miss Cicely Hammond.*

"Dear Madam,—*I am authorised to offer you two thousand pounds for your lot at corner of Hayes Avenue and Milburn Street, cash payment in full to be made at time of transfer. An early reply will oblige yours very truly,*

"Russell Webster."

He held the book away from him and stared hard at the copy. Then he laughed.

"The most anxious old maid that ever longed to change her name couldn't mistake that for a proposal," he chuckled. "No, there's some blunder, but it isn't mine. I'll go up there at once and see the lady and tell her about it. It's the gentlemanly thing to do. I can easily see that it's no joke from her point of view."

A little later, as he sat back in a forward corner of the electric car, he tried to recall all he had heard about the lady. She had very lately taken up her residence in one of the fashionable suburbs. She had come into possession of the property of a deceased citizen, and was reputed very wealthy.

He pictured her as a woman of mature age, of presumable intelligence and refinement, and with a distaste for the demands of active society. And while he was still busy with his imaginary portrait, he reached the street where the lady resided.

His ring at the door was answered by a young woman—a young woman who wore a light stuff gown and a neat white apron. Russell looked at this sudden vision admiringly.

"Is Miss Hammond at home?" he asked.

"Have you an appointment?" inquired the young woman, and Russell was much pleased with the mellow resonance of her tones. He had a theory that the feminine voice was an excellent guide to the feminine character.

"No," replied Russell, "but my business is of a somewhat urgent as well as personal nature."

The young woman looked at him a little doubtfully.

"Come in," she said, and ushered him into a handsome apartment that seemed to combine the purposes of both office and library. She motioned Russell to a chair and paused beside the large writing-table in the centre of the roomy

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apartment, as if waiting for the caller to announce his business.

"My card," said Russell.

The young woman glanced at the pasteboard.

"The answer," said Russell, with a little catch in his voice, "was not entirely satisfactory, and I felt it would be better for all concerned to ask for a—a clearer reply from Miss Hammond herself."

The young woman opened her eyes.

"I can't see how it could be made any clearer," she said.

"It depends on the point of view," said Russell. He looked about him as if for possible listeners, and lowered his voice. "Are you Miss Hammond's secretary?" he asked.

"I do her writing," replied the young woman.

"Then," said Russell, "I think it would be fair to show you this extraordinary letter before Miss Hammond sees it." And he placed the document in her hand.

"Thank you for your consideration," she said, and unfolded the letter.

Suddenly a pink flush stole across her rounded cheek. Then she smiled. Then both flush and smile deepened and she suddenly sank into the desk chair, and dropping her head on the table laughed and laughed.

"I am glad you find it amusing," said Russell. "Do you think Miss Hammond will consider it equally funny?"

The young woman looked up at him with swimming eyes.

"Sir," she said, "I must ask you to pardon me, but if I were certain I would receive my discharge the next minute I couldn't help laughing." And she laughed again.

"As I have said," remarked Russell, "I am very glad you can take it this way. It struck me as having an amusing side. Yet at the same time I can't help feeling a little anxious about the other fellow."

At this the young woman suddenly stopped laughing and opened her eyes very wide indeed. Then she hastily hurried to the most distant window and stared out for several moments. And Russell felt sure she was laughing again. When she looked round her eyes were still wet.

"I beg your pardon for being so hysterical," she said. "But you see I really couldn't help it. That last remark of yours quite capped the climax."

"Then am I to understand that Miss Hammond's answer to my offer was also in the nature of a refusal?" said Russell.

"It was," the young woman replied with a quick catch in her voice.

"Would it be asking too much if I requested to know the exact wording of Miss Hammond's letter to me?" Russell asked.

The young woman hesitated.

"Circumstances have somewhat altered the situation," she said, "and yet I think it is your right to receive what was originally intended for you."

"I agree with you," said Russell. "But of course the original cannot be recalled. It may be possible, however, that the receiver will come here just as I have done to find out what it all means."

The girl shook her head.

"No," she said, "he will do nothing of the sort. I think you will understand why when you see a copy of the letter that was intended for you. Here it is."

She opened a book lying on the table and turned back a few pages. Russell came forward.

"It is just the pencilled draft," she said, "but it was copied word for word."

Russell read it aloud.

"*Your communication with offer is at hand. At present I have no intention of letting any of my property pass out of my hands. Very truly yours.*"

Russell looked round at the young woman.

"Can you blame me for laughing?" she said. "Isn't that about the curtest thing you ever saw in the way of a refusal of a marriage offer?"

Russell nodded.

"And—and, does it fit the case?" he asked.

"Exactly," replied the young woman. "And it fits all the closer because it was done unconsciously."

"And the man will not suspect that a mistake has been made?"

"Not for a moment."

Russell shook his head ruefully.

"I'd awfully hate to deserve a reply like that," he said. "I don't believe I could." He looked at the young woman sharply. "I beg your pardon," he added, "but it appears to me that you are on extremely confidential terms with Miss Hammond."

"That is true," said the young woman.

"I wasn't aware that answers to offers of marriage were usually left in the hands of secretaries," Russell went on.

The young woman laughed.

"There is no sentiment about offers of this sort," she said. "They are simply unimportant business details."

Russell laughed as much at the way in which the young woman said this as he did at the idea.

"Then if I made a proposal of marriage to Miss Hammond," he went on, "I could expect that you would answer it?"

"Most assuredly," replied the young woman. "That is, unless it went by mistake to some puzzled dealer in property."

"Well, there is no immediate danger," said Russell. "But this brings me back to business. Of course I am to understand that my offer for the lot is rejected?"

"Of course," said the young woman. "You know the lot is worth much more," she said.

"Yes," he replied, "it is worth more. You understand that I was simply the agent of other parties."

"No doubt you thought that here was a chance to obtain a bargain from a simple and quite unsophisticated woman, who might be glad to jump at the chance of securing such a sum it cash."

"No," said Russell, "I didn't think anything of the kind. I simply tried to execute the commission that was given me. I would do the same if you intrusted me with a similar piece of business."

"Very well," said the young woman. "As a proof of your good faith you may take that same lot of land and let us see how good a price you can get for it."

"Does Miss Hammond authorise this?" Russell inquired.

"If the price is right," said the young woman, "she can be persuaded."

Russell took his hat.

"I will report in a few days," he said. He hesitated. "As I am, apparently, to transact this business with you, would it be a presumption to ask your name?"

"Not at all," replied the young woman. "I am Miss Vane."

"Good morning, Miss Vane," said Russell, and was gone.

He smiled over his singular adventure all the way back to the office. What a bright and charming girl that Miss Vane was. He wasn't quite sure that he had ever heard a woman's unrestrained laughter that was at all pleasant before. She must be a delightful companion, no matter how crotchety her old maid employer might be. He would show her

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what he could do with that corner lot. He would convince her of his honesty and energy.

Four days later he again greeted Miss Vane. He fancied she seemed pleased to see him.

"I have been quite fortunate," he said; "I found an out-of-town purchaser for the lot."

"And the price?"

"Three thousand pounds, cash down, and it is a very good price, too."

"I trust," said Miss Vane, "that you have used no irregular means."

"What do you mean?"

"You didn't work on his sympathies, did you? You didn't tell him that Miss Hammond sorely needed the money? You didn't add she was a crochety old maid and as stubborn as an army mule, did you?"

She said this with such an innocent air that Russell couldn't feel offended.

"Sentiment would be of no earthly use with this man," he said. "He's as hard as nails. He knew all about the lot. He wants it and he's willing to give a fancy price for it. As for using Miss Hammond's personal peculiarities as an aid in the transaction, I couldn't well do that, because I never saw her."

"Very true," said Miss Vane. She hesitated a moment. "The price is satisfactory," she said. "Miss Hammond would have taken nothing less. Here are her deed and the abstract. Will you kindly prepare the papers and arrange all the details?"

The transfer was completed a few days later when Russell handed Miss Vane a cheque for the amount.

"And how much does Miss Hammond owe you for your services?" she asked.

"The regular commission charged is two per cent.," he replied.

She unlocked a drawer of the table and drew out a package of bank notes and counted off the amount.

"There is sixty pounds, I think," she said. "Please run it over."

Russell deftly ran through the pile and nodded, and then he counted off a certain amount and placed it on the table before the young woman.

"What's this?" she demanded.

"That's your share," he said. "Half and half, you know. I am perfectly well aware that without your aid I couldn't have touched a penny of this sum. Don't look like that. You've earned it all right."

"B—but I can't take it," protested Miss Vane.

"Of course you can take it," said Russell. "You must take it. This isn't a gift. It's a cold-blooded business transaction. I fancy you'll know what to do with it. I'm quite sure that little windfalls of this sort never come amiss to me."

Miss Vane was about to speak, but Russell looked so determined that she changed her mind and gathered up the notes.

"Thank you," she said. "I'm quite sure I never earned so much money at one time before—if I earned it."

"You did," laughed Russell, as he rose.

"One moment," said Miss Vane. "Miss Hammond has been making inquiries about you. They are quite satisfactory. She wants a man of business. Someone who can attend to the details of the management of her estate. She favours you. It will not take all your time at present. Later on she may require more from you. If you take the place you will report to me here twice a week. The salary can be arranged later when the duties of the place are fully determined, but I think you will find Miss Hammond a person of liberal views on this point. What do you say?"

Russell looked at her with an air of indecision.

"What would you advise?" he asked. "I certainly would want to earn my money."

"There'll be no fear about that," laughed Miss Vane, and her smile was very attractive.

"Convey my thanks to Miss Hammond," he said, "and tell her I am pleased to accept her offer."

The oftener Russell met Miss Vane the more charmed he was with her. At the seventh meeting he was convinced he had loved her from the very start. At the eighth meeting he was fully satisfied that life would be a dismal wilderness without her.

At the ninth meeting he had the courage to say:

"I suppose Miss Hammond would miss you greatly if you left her?"

"She couldn't do without me," said Miss Vane.

"Who could blame her?" murmured Russell, and then was instantly convinced that he had said something inexcusably bold. But he quickly rallied and remarked that it was strange he hadn't met Miss Hammond yet.

"Not at all," said Miss Vane, "she does not care to meet strangers."

"But I am not exactly a stranger," said Russell.

"You will see her some day," said Miss Vane. "At present she is interested in settling her affairs and superintending certain improvements. When she returns from the Continent she will open up her house and try to become acquainted with her new neighbours."

"The Continent?" repeated Russell. "And do you go, too?"

"Yes," replied Miss Vane.

"And how long do you—I mean Miss Hammond, intend to stay?"

"Six months, I believe."

Russell went back to his office with a heavy heart. Could he endure it to forego seeing that charming face for six months?

He didn't think he could.

Then he plucked up his courage and sat down and wrote Miss Vane a love letter that was also an offer of marriage. It was a long letter. He told her about himself, his plans, his hopes, his present standing. He told her how she had come into his life like a ray of sunshine, and how his admiration and respect and gratitude had all merged into love. Theirs was a brief acquaintance, he admitted, but they were both free and independent, and had but themselves to please.

It was a nice letter, a tender, earnest letter, yet Russell dropped it in the letter-box with fear and trembling, and how eagerly he seized his post the next morning and ran through the letters.

There was just the briefest note in the familiar handwriting—

"*To avoid any possibility of further mistakes, will Mr. Webster call in person for a reply to his proposition?*"

There was no name signed to this and Russell turned it over blankly. Then he took his hat and started out to learn his fate.

Miss Vane received him with grave courtesy, which was quite unlike her usual manner. He noticed that her cheeks were a little flushed and that there was a rose in her pretty hair.

"Sit down, Mr. Webster," she said, and fixed her gentle eyes upon him. "Miss Hammond," she began with a little hesitation, "was much pleased with your letter."

"Miss Hammond?"

"She liked its manly ring, and, of course, was highly gratified by the compliment it paid her."

"Miss Hammond, did you say?"

Miss Vane took no notice of the interruption but went on speaking.

"She was even inclined to look upon your offer with favour, but wanted first to secure a personal interview."

Russell looked about him in an agony of apprehension.

"Miss Hammond!" he murmured. "Heavens, has there been another blunder?"

His troubled glance fell upon Miss Vane. She was silently laughing, and her eyes were moist as they met Russell's.

"No," she softly said, "there is no mistake this time, dear friend. Cicely Vane Hammond—Cicely Vane, until, at her uncle's last request, she took the name of Hammond—approves in person of your latest and best effort to advance her dearest interest."

And with a tender smile she extended both her hands.

W. R. Rose.

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On One Condition.

Poet: "I have here, sir, my last effusion." Editor: "If I were quite sure of that, I'd buy it."

Her Feet Weren't Small.

Mattie: "I want you to know I don't stand on trifles." Helen (glancing at her feet): "No, dear, I see you don't."

He Couldn't Do It.

She: "I don't understand you quite." He: "Well, I can't supply you with intelligence." She: "No; you have none to spare."

He Took the Hint.

He: "May I kiss your hand?" She: "Certainly. But if you had intimated that you preferred hands I would not have removed my veil."

Jack Liked Laps.

Jack: "Madge, I think you would make an excellent pedestrian." Madge: "Why, Jack?" Jack: "Because you can cover so many laps in so short a time."

Not Very Complimentary.

He: "What lovely flowers. Do you know, they remind me of you?" She: "They are artificial flowers." He: "Yes, I know; but it requires close examination to detect it."

Laughter Turned to Tears.

"Did you ever laugh until you cried, Tommy? "Yes, only this morning." "What at?" "Well, pa stepped on a tack and I laughed; then pa caught me laughing and I cried."

Taking Him Down.

Jack (fond of putting it on a bit): "I dined at my friend, the Duchess of Pudboro's, last week, and, would you believe it, we had no fish." Nellie: "Ah, well, I suppose they ate it all upstairs."

An Early Rise Guaranteed.

Applicant: "Of course I don't ask for a partnership yet, but give me a position in which I will be sure of an early rise." Employer: "All right; I'll make you caretaker of the building. You will open the doors at 4 a.m."

Better Value for Money.

Mr. Newrich (to artist): "I think, on the whole, I won't take the picture. I prefer spending my cash in statues rather than in pictures; because you see more than one side of a statue, and get your money's worth better."

The Old Lady Didn't Approve.

A Scottish preacher once said: "But, my brethren, I will not dwell longer on this subject," only to hear a shrill voice from the gallery, from a woman who did not approve of written sermons: "Ye canna, for your paper's rin out."

Used for the Proper Purpose.

Mrs. Billus (after the company had gone): "Johnny, you shouldn't have eaten those preserved fruits. They are not intended to be eaten. They were put on the table to fill up." Johnny Billus: "Well, that's what I used 'em for, mamma."

Very Particular.

"Your friend, Miss Blank, seems a very strict teetotaler," said a man, commenting on a girl who had refused to eat plum-pudding with brandy sauce. "Strict doesn't express it," replied the girl's friend. "Why, don't you know she's so particular she won't heat her curling-tongs over a spirit lamp."

He was Too Flippant.

Mr. Lawhead: "Why do you treat me so coldly? Why didn't you answer the note I wrote you last Thursday?" Miss Brushley: "Sir, I don't wish to have anything more to say to you. You began your note by saying you 'thought you would drop me a line.' I want you to understand that I'm not a fish."

Couldn't Say the Right Thing.

"It's no use!" exclaimed Willie Wishington, "I never can learn to say the right thing at the right time. I told Miss Slimmins that her eyes shone on me like the stars above." "That's old, but pretty," answered Miss Cayenne. "Yes. But she is one of those remarkably tall girls who resent any references to their height."

Only Wanted the Hand.

Old Crusty: "You ask for my daughter? Why, young man, at your present salary you couldn't even dress her." Suitor: "Oh, yes, sir! I could keep her in gloves." Old Crusty: "Gloves! Do you mean to insinuate that my daughter would wear only gloves?" Suitor: "Pardon me, sir; I only asked for her hand."

Glad She Refused Him.

"Clara—Miss Simpkins," he murmured, as he reached for his hat after her disinclination, "when you think of a little road where we used to wander in the happy month of July, beneath the branches of the green trees, I pray you think of me. For I am like that little road—a lover slain;" and so he passed out of sight. And then she was glad she had answered him no.

Gave it to the Calves.

He was a cyclist, and called at a farmhouse for a glass of water, but the farmer's pretty daughter offered him a glass of milk instead. "Won't you have another glass?" she asked, as he drained the tumbler. "You are very good," he said, "but I am afraid I shall rob you." "Oh, no! We have so much more than we can use ourselves that we always give it to the calves."

It Couldn't be Becoming.

Mrs. Fashionplate: "Now, John, I want you to leave this bonnet at the milliner's, and tell her that it is not at all becoming to me, and I don't want it." Mr. Fashionplate: "Why, I thought I heard Mrs. Gadabout tell you yesterday that you looked charming in it?" Mrs. Fashionplate: "Yes, that's the reason I'm returning it. I'm sure now it must be a perfect fright."

A Tongue-Twister.

"George!" she screamed, "my neck!" "What's the matter?" "There's a pillacatter——" "A what?" "A taperkiller——" "What in the world do you mean?" "Oh, dear!" she moaned, as she clutched him frantically, "A kitterpaller! You know, George! A patterkiller!" "Oh!" said George, with evident relief, and he proceeded to brush the caterpillar away.

Healthy for the Brother.

"Wilfred is a perfect dear," cried a gushing young lady to a cynical friend. "He's going to learn to smoke straight away, just to please me." "How clever of you to persuade him," sneered the cynical friend. "A *fiancé* who doesn't smoke, I suppose, is too effeminate to be worth having?" "You mistake my motive, dear. You see Wilfred has a birthday once a year." "You don't say so!" "And he has the masculine weakness for receiving presents on that auspicious occasion." "Yes?" "And my good, kind-hearted, generous brother Jack has just opened a tobacco shop!"

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

THIRTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

His Crown of Sorrow.

"Miss Lodge, tell me! Why am I kept here; and why do you walk so softly about the room? I have been wondering for a long time what that shadow was that passed and repassed before my eyes, like a memory of long ago."

"Dear Mr. Vivyan, please don't excite yourself! The doctor told me to keep you very quiet, and not to let you talk," said the low, gentle voice of the girl who was known in the "Retreat" as Mr. Vivyan's secretary, but who for a week had also been his devoted nurse.

The man moved his head restlessly upon his pillows. It was the first time since he had left the "Retreat" that night to meet the unknown friend who was to have given him the tokens of his dead wife and child, that he had opened his eyes; and, as he gazed languidly round the room at the familiar landmarks, he wondered whether, after all, he had not been dreaming that he had lain a long time in a place where he had listened to the rush and roar of many waters! Perhaps they had been the waves of the waters of death that had lapped his brow with cold, damp fingers.

He beckoned the girl to him—the girl with the face and voice of one who rose before him ever as a ghost from the past, that cruel past that had closed the doors of joy on him for ever!

"Tell me, child," he said. "I have forgotten something. I went out—but how did I return?"

Ivy bent over him with a troubled face. She knew that he ought not to talk, yet she hardly liked to refuse to answer his question, for to do so might bring on the fever again, and she dreaded those long hours again, listening to the incoherent ramblings of a man in delirium—a man who seemed to have suffered in some strange way, almost more than she had herself.

"I will answer you just that one question," she replied gently; "then will leave you unless you try to go to sleep."

He nodded. "Just this one question, 'Nurse Lodge,'" he said, with a faint smile; "then I will be good."

"Well," she murmured softly; "you were brought back to the 'Retreat' the next evening. I had been, oh, so fearfully anxious about you, and Mrs. Riley also; we sat up all night. The men who came with you in a cab said they had rescued you from drowning. They picked you up off—Rotherhithe—I think was the name of the place.

"You had been struck on the head and were unconscious when they took you from the cold river on to their barge. Then"—she started, as a sudden gleam of memory flickered into the eyes of the man on the bed. "Then they looked in your coat, and found a card with your name on it, in an inner pocket; so they brought you back to the 'Retreat' ill, unconscious, but safe!" and her eyes welled with a flood of tears.

"Ah!" he breathed deeply; "was it Providence, I wonder, that intervened for me? An unusual courtesy on my behalf! I begin to think that I must be changing the luck that has been so long against me!" He started up in bed and seized her arm. "Miss Lodge! they deceived me. I remember now; I went to get the photo they promised me of my wife—my dear Margaret. It was a lie—a foul plot to get rid of me; but I don't know who it was."

"But you will know when you are better," she murmured soothingly; "for then you will be able to trace your enemies, or whoever it was who threw you into the river."

He looked at her dully. "Tell me, when shall I be out of this bed? My work keeps calling me, and I shall go mad if I am kept here much longer. There is so much to do—so little time to do it in!"

Her hand touched the burning one of the man on the bed. Her tender, sympathetic heart had gone out to the weary, tempest-tossed soul who had depended upon her nursing to bring him back to life.

"In a few days now," she murmured softly, "you will be able to move about the house; then into the garden for a short stroll; and, lastly, into our workroom! But you must not worry or think too much about these cowardly ruffians who flung you into the river! They will be punished soon enough!"

His fingers closed on hers for a second, and the keen desire for revenge that had seized him passed out of his eyes.

"I am afraid I am a bad patient," he said with a faint smile; "but you will forgive me, Miss Lodge, when I tell you that I have a mission to accomplish before I die; and I am fearful that I may go without fulfilling it!"

Her eyes filled with a sudden mist. "Don't talk about dying, dear Mr. Vivyan! It hurts me to hear you speak so sadly! Leave your mission to a higher vengeance than you can bestow, and just think of nothing but getting better! Remember, I want you, too!"

"You want me, too?" he murmured dreamily. "How lovely it is to hear those words, Miss Lodge! It is many years since anyone wanted me! Many years!"

"Indeed, I need you very much," she replied softly. "For I should be homeless and penniless should you not require me at the dear old 'Retreat'! So get better, for my sake!"

"For your sake," he murmured; "yes, Miss Lodge, I will get better, and we will finish 'Canker' together! Then, perhaps, we will go abroad for a change!"

She held a cup of beef tea to his lips, and after seeing him fall into a natural slumber, left the room.

Outside, Mrs. Riley, the kind, motherly housekeeper, met her, and took her into the breakfast-room where lunch was laid.

"Now you must eat, my dear," said the motherly old woman, "or what will the master do if his nurse falls ill? And you are growing thinner every day. There'll be nothing left of you soon but a shadow!"

The girl smiled, wearily. "A very substantial shadow, Mrs. Riley! In fact, I never felt stronger."

The woman smiled. "Anyway, I'm not going to let you go wearing yourself out, Miss Lodge. It isn't fair that you should do all the hard work; and that's why I'm particularly glad that a friend of mine—a trained nurse—is coming to see me, and will be able to let you have a rest sometimes. She has just left her case up in the country."

Ivy smiled silently. She was glad that there would be a woman of experience on the spot, for she felt that her knowledge was inadequate to compete with Mr. Vivyan's nervous temperament when he was convalescent. He required someone stronger of will than herself and less interested. Once during lunch she crept inside the room where the patient lay and caught him sitting up in bed.

"I only want to read, or look at pictures," he said, in answer

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to her protestation; "I can't sleep; and turning over the leaves of something may keep me from thinking."

Putting some periodicals on a table beside him, she gazed at him wistfully.

"Don't look too long, then. You will grow very weary, and your brains will, perhaps, be too much excited to sleep. Promise me, dear Mr. Vivyan, that you will stop when you feel tired!"

He smiled at her pale, flower-like face and soft, earnest eyes.

"You seem almost concerned about me, dear little girl!" he murmured. "It is long, long years since I heard a woman's voice so tenderly pleading! I am provoked to be disobedient, just to hear you scold me again. But run away now," he went on kindly; "you need a rest more than I; you should have a trained nurse to help you."

"Mrs. Riley has a friend who has been a nurse coming to see her to-day," she replied; "so I shall have the benefit of her knowledge. But I have been so glad to have been of some use to you," she went on softly. "You came into my life when it was at a very low ebb, and saved me from something worse than death!"

Before he could question her she had slipped from the room, and Vernon Vivyan turned over the leaves of the books with thoughtful eyes. Presently he tired of the sameness of the magazines, with their highly-coloured pictures, and gazed round the room in search of something else. On a table near the side of the bed there was a little leather case, with the word "Photographs" written across it in gold letters.

"I suppose that belongs to my little secretary and nurse!" he mused thoughtfully; "a photo. of her sweetheart, and the dead mother, and all the usual links that a fair, beautiful creature like that should possess, though she appears to be strangely lonely now. A lover's quarrel, perhaps," he sighed. "God grant it may only be a *quarrel!*"

He looked at the case again. It fascinated him peculiarly, and he felt a longing to see the face of the boy who had won the love of the girl who reminded him so poignantly of the past.

He stretched out his hand to the table, and drew the book towards him.

Innocent Ivy! She had not acquired the cunning of the criminal, and burnt or done away with the photographs that would most assuredly have betrayed her had they been seen by anyone from Melton. She had not been able to resist bringing her few prized treasures with her—the faces of those who had become so closely knit by links of memory, both dear and painful.

One by one the man in the bed gazed at them, smiling at the frank, boyish face of Jack Maitland that flashed with a gleam of youth into his own from the cardboard. He knew that it was the sweetheart of the girl who had nursed him so devotedly back to life; and, gazing with interest upon the spoilt, petulant child, Woolf, standing with his hand on the collar of a Great Dane; the roguish, laughing face of Muriel warmed his heart with a glow of youth.

"I wonder who they are?" he murmured. "Brothers and sisters, I suppose; with the exception of the photo. that has the inscription, 'Yours ever, Jack,' on it. *He* is no brother! Ah!"—turning over another—"this is the dead father. Looks like an old squire; and this"—taking up the last in the case with idle fingers—"this, of course, is the once mother of the family."

He looked at the photo. indifferently at first; he was beginning to feel sleepy; but, as his eyes fell upon the radiant, audacious beauty of the woman who gazed up at him with a laugh lurking in the depths of her great eyes, and a mocking smile of bewildering charm on her parted lips, the ex-convict and famous author uttered a low cry of fear and startled wonder.

"No, no!" he said aloud, speaking in a low, tense voice; "this woman is rich, the jewels on her neck, hair, and arms prove that! She can have nothing to do with the ghost of my poor lost Margaret. Yet it is the image of her, or what she would have been had Fate allowed her to grow into mature womanhood! *He* told me she was dead," he went on with increasing excitement, and sitting straight up in the bed; "he said she had died—with the child!"

A curious expression stole into his burning eyes, a bright hectic spot flamed on either cheek, as a thought sprang forward to sicken and horrify him in sheer terror of a worse calamity than death having befallen the one star in the blackness of his firmament.

"I believed him!" he laughed bitterly; "I took what the liar and perjurer flung at me in mockery as gospel truth! How do I know that he spoke the truth? How do I know that Fate has not dealt more cruelly by her in letting her believe *me* dead? My Margaret! My Pearl of great price, if this picture is not that of a double, then God help us both! It were better that I had indeed perished at the hands of my enemies than you should learn the awful truth!"

He scanned the photo. again, and something in the laughing, joyous face told him that here was no woman living in durance vile, whose heart was buried in the grave of a dead child, but a woman who took all that life had to offer, with open hands, and gave little in return.

"She looks happy!" he muttered. "If memory lingers behind that smooth, low brow, it does so callously. She is radiant and contented; time has only touched her to enhance her beauty; while I——" he struck the photo. with a sudden rage—"while I have had the burden of a life's wrong to whiten my hair and sear my face!"

He hastily put the photos into the case, then fell back upon the pillows with a harsh laugh.

"I will know the worst! And when I know—when my doubts are convinced of the truth—I will get back a little of what that black-hearted villain has dealt me! Our score will be a heavy one to settle!"

He laughed again, and flung his arms above his head in a paroxysm of helpless rage.

"Oh, God! grant that she is dead! Better to mourn her dead than revile her living!"

THIRTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Father and Daughter.

Immediately after lunch Ivy went to her room for a few seconds before returning to her charge. She had listened at the door of the sick room on her way upstairs, and as everything was still quiet, had breathed a sigh of relief and passed on.

Since that night when her hands had suddenly been so full with the master of the house, she had not been able to dwell much upon the events of the past. She had insisted on keeping within the "Retreat" in spite of Mrs. Riley's attempts to make her go for a walk.

As each day dawned and set, she knew that for one day more she was safe from those who were searching for the runaway from Melton—the girl whom they imagined had been concerned in the death of a man! If they only knew the relationship between herself and the tramp in the spinny they would not have suspected her of such a cruel deed!

But now she felt that she had successfully evaded all those that searched for her, even to her arch-enemy, Digby Scarlett, whom she had feared even more than the police!

She sighed wearily as she compared her present secret existence with that of the year before. Then, she had been happy in the love of the man for whom she had cared above all others; and now, a hunted, desperate creature, she had only the memory of a past happiness to console her for the loss of her lover and her peace of mind. She wondered what was happening at Maitland Manor, and whether her ladyship ever gave her a thought, now that she was gone.

She roused herself with a sigh, and shook off the memories of the past, as she rose from the chair into which she had flung herself, and brushed her ruffled hair before the glass. At least there was one person to whom she was of some use; one human soul who was as lonely as herself!

As she stood before the window, a cab drew up at the gate of the "Retreat," and she looked curiously to see the friend of whom Mrs. Riley had spoken earlier in the day.

A dark, insignificant-looking woman stepped from the cab,

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but she was wrapped in shawls, and the gloom of the late afternoon concealed her face from the wistful eyes of the girl gazing through the window. Later, when she slipped from her room, she met Mrs. Riley on the stairs.

"Now, my dear," that kindly woman said, "I am going into the master, to sit with him while you talk to my friend the trained nurse. I have told her all about you, Miss—if you will excuse the liberty—and she is only too glad to be of any use to you that she can. If you will go into my sitting-room you will find her there, Miss, having a cup of tea. I will give master the beef tea and all, until you, or my friend, come upstairs."

Ivy, smiling slightly, passed on, glad that the nurse had taken over the responsibility of her highly-strung charge, and yet regretting a little the loss of her supremacy in the sick room.

As she turned the handle of the door, a woman rose from a chair with its back to the light, and she could only distinguish the faint outline of a black bonnet and draped figure.

"Mrs. Riley told me you would assist me in nursing Mr. Vivyan," Ivy began courteously. "I shall be very glad of your experience, Mrs.—" She paused politely, waiting for the silent woman to speak.

Slowly and deliberately the nurse moved forward, gazing with wide, terror-stricken eyes at the white, fragile face of Mr. Vivyan's secretary.

"Don't you know me, Miss?" she whispered cautiously.

Ivy took a step back, her suspicions aroused by the woman's agitation, and a strange feeling that she had heard that voice somewhere else, making her dread discovery at the eleventh hour!

"Who—who are you?" she answered, with trembling lips. "I don't remember you. My name is Lodge!"

She flung her head back defiantly, and waited for the stranger to speak.

The nurse put her hands out intreatingly, and the words that fell from her lips were like unto a cry of pain.

"Miss! Miss! Don't deny who you are! I know your secret better than you do yourself. You are the runaway wanted by the police, and the daughter of——"

"Stop!" The girl's desperate, hunted eyes flashed into those of the woman who had torn her disguise from her. "I remember you! You are nurse Beaumont—*his* nurse! You won't betray me, will you? I admit that I am Ivy Strange, but no more. I did not commit that—that crime! Let me stay here in peace; I am doing no harm, no wrong; only trying to be of some use in the world, now that *he* is dead!"—and her voice broke into a storm of tears, as she clutched the cloak of the nurse to whom she prayed for mercy.

"Hush, dearie! Hush!" said the older woman, tenderly, her own eyes welling with sympathy, as her fingers caught those of the girl; "I'd sooner die than let them know where you are; and I don't believe for one moment that you did it, in spite of your running away so strange, Miss," then, correcting herself, she added, tentatively: "I should say ma'am now, I suppose?"

Ivy looked up in surprise. "Why, ma'am?" she said, puzzled.

The woman glanced at the third finger of her left hand. It was ringless, and she uttered an exclamation of relief.

"I was afraid, dearie," she answered, "that you had been led into marrying that—that Mr. Scarlett. And if you had done so"—she shivered—"you would have regretted it all the days of your life!"

Ivy glanced at her in astonishment. "You know that he met me, and tried to make me promise to marry him?" she said slowly. "I—I—nearly did so, when he told me that my darling Jack was dead!" And her lip quivered painfully.

"What did you say, Miss?" Nurse Beaumont grasped her quickly. "Did that villain tell you such a cruel lie as that? Why, Mr. Maitland is alive, and, what's more, he's going to help you, and fight for you! The first thing he called for was 'Ivy,' as soon as he grew better!"

"Jack alive!" Ivy cried—the great spirit of hope once more springing into her heart—"then I'm willing to face anything so long as he believes in me!"

She buried her face in her hands, and for a moment the tears of the woman and the girl mingled.

Suddenly Ivy rose; her face had clouded, and her eyes had again become troubled.

"I forgot, nurse," she said slowly. "Though I am thankful and rejoice in his not being dead, there is a barrier between him and myself that is even greater than death. It can never be bridged over but must always stand between us!"

Nurse Beaumont looked at her strangely. "A barrier stronger than death, child! Why, you have nothing to be ashamed of, I'll swear!" She stopped abruptly, and, leaning forward, said impressively: "Has the barrier anything to do with—a broad arrow?"

The effect of her words was not unexpected. The girl flushed deeply, and, recoiling from her questioner, said hoarsely: "What do you mean? What do you know?"

Nurse Beaumont hesitated, then answered quickly: "I will tell you another time, miss. Only bear up, and try to forget that broad arrow. The dead should be forgiven their sins!"

"Forgiven!" said the girl bitterly. "I forgive the dead freely, but—but I cannot forget that he had no mercy on me when alive!"

The woman was about to answer her when the door opened, and Mrs. Riley came in. She looked worried and pale.

"Is Mr. Vivyan asleep?" Ivy said quickly; her truant thoughts flying back to the kind man whose house had been a refuge to her in her hour of need.

"No," the housekeeper answered slowly; "I can't make it out at all. He was doing so nicely this morning, and now the fever seems to be returning, and he's muttering and going on something awful! I shall be glad when the doctor comes again."

Nurse Beaumont hastily removed her cloak and bonnet.

"I'll go up and attend to him," she said calmly. "It is better for as few people as possible to be in a sick room; and if I want anything, Miss—Miss Lodge," she said quickly, "I will ask you to help me."

She went into the room where the master of the "Retreat" lay, with his eyes turned to the ceiling, and the long, nervous hands plucking at the bedclothes. Approaching softly, she leant over him and gazed with a long, intent look into his face. Something—the contour of the finely-chiselled features, and the fixed intensity of the dark eyes—reminded her vaguely of a man whose face she had remembered after long years.

"What a silly I am!" she murmured, "to let that man haunt me, now, when the poor chap's been dead this many a year!"

She turned softly from his bed, when suddenly the man lying there, spoke. "Is that you, Margaret! My little Margaret? How I love you; and now you are dead, dear one, and I have no time to tell you that I was innocent! The charge was false—false as the blackguard who invented it!

"Margaret! I dreamt last night that you had married again! It is not true, my love? Tell me that during all the years I have languished you have not spent them with another! Do you hear? Margaret! Speak!"

He raised himself in the bed with an effort, and stared before him with unseeing eyes.

Nurse Beaumont was seized with one of those flashes of inspiration that come but rarely into a life's experience.

"She will be here soon, sir!" she whispered soothingly, while her breath fluttered to her lips in unequal pants; "don't fret—Mr. Grant—she is not far off now!"

He moved his head restlessly. "Grant! Grant! It is a long time since I heard that name with the prefix! Not since the day they took me away from you, Margaret!" He sat up stiffly in the bed, and clinging to the counterpane as though gripping the rail of the dock, said loudly and in a clear, ringing voice:

"Not guilty, my lord! Not—guilty!" Then his voice broke into a wail that made the blood of the listening woman run cold in her veins.

"You haven't come yet, Margaret! Be quick, dear one, and we'll go together—together"—he laughed softly—"and they tell me there was a baby, Margaret! Bring it with you, too—our baby!"

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Hot, blinding tears ran down the face of the woman who saw for a second time the tragedy of a life enacted by the unconscious victim whom she had long since counted among the dead!

What was the end to be now? Nurse Beaumont thought, with a shiver. How was the secret to be kept?

A noise at the door disturbed her, and at the same time roused the patient from his momentary lethargy.

"Can I help you?" Ivy asked, softly, coming forward into the light.

Vernon Vivyan laughed harshly. "So you have come back at last, Margaret! You have not changed since the day we married! Come here; I want to look at you! To see the woman who deserted me in my extremity! Come here!"

She went forward quickly; his delirious words raising no resentment in her tender heart, only a great pity for the strong man in his weakness.

"Yes," she said gently, touching one hot hand with her own cool one; "I have come at last!"

He clutched her hand savagely in his; Nurse Beaumont, watching with suspended breath the faces of the man and girl, each, though neither knew it, knit by ties of blood!

"So you have left him!" he went on. "He has sent you to laugh over my downfall, perhaps, to tell him what I suffer!"

"Ask him whom he means, Miss," whispered the nurse in her ear; and, obeying blindly, Ivy said softly:

"Whom is it you think I have left?"

"My enemy!" went on the thick voice of the unconscious man; "the man who crushed me!"

"His name—ask the name, Miss," panted the woman by her side; and, wonderingly the girl murmured:

"Won't you tell me the name of this enemy?"

"Yes—yes—his name!" he muttered wildly. "It is written across my heart in blood! His name is Digby Scarlett!"

Ivy sprang back with a cry of horror. "Digby Scarlett!" she exclaimed; "he wronged you too!"

"Ah!" he said exultingly; "so you remember him, do you? The man you forgot me for! But now I will wipe out one at least of my wrongs!"

He snatched suddenly at her throat, and drew her down to him, his hand tightening round it like a fine cord.

As one roused from a dreadful nightmare, Nurse Beaumont sprang forward and caught his arm.

"Sir! sir!" she panted, drawing the half-unconscious girl towards her; "for the love of Heaven, stop! You are killing your own daughter!"

THIRTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

A Duel of Wits.

"It is only a question of days! He may live longer, but if he does, it will only be to end his life in a madhouse!"

The doctor had spoken plainly, almost brutally, to the beautiful woman who questioned him, standing with a white face and great violet eyes, waiting to hear the verdict the consultation had brought forth.

"A question of days?" she murmured with a shiver. "You mean he may die?"

Dr. Grey shrugged his shoulders. It had struck him that this perfect type of woman had not been sufficiently upset at the sudden collapse of his old friend, Sir Trevor Maitland, and he resented as a personal affront the calm, ice-like manner she had of repeating his words.

"Yes, Lady Maitland," he said brusquely, "I mean what I say; Sir Trevor has had a shock that has struck at the very root of his being. This paralysis is only the beginning of the end."

When the doctor had left and the nurse was in possession of the sick room, Lady Maitland went to her boudoir—the room where the tragedy of her life had taken place.

But it was not of those things that she was thinking now.

Of the man upstairs she only thought once, and that was that it was his awkward entrance into the room that had flung

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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her into her present unenviable position. She had never loved Sir Trevor, but he had always been kind to her, and, above everything, he was the father of her boy, Woolf. She feared that he might die before she knew precisely the wording of the will, and the position of the child she loved.

Of the contempt and loathing Heriot North must have felt for her at the exposure of her double lying to him, by Digby Scarlett, she cared but little. All was swamped in the one desire to known how her boy stood in his father's will—the boy for whose sake she had jeopardised her future!

"If I could find out!" she murmured. "He might perhaps imply in some way that Woolf had been properly provided for. His other children are already in possession of their mother's money; but I will not stand by and see my boy neglected."

She opened the window and let the room fill with the soft, mild air. Suddenly, a low murmur of voices reached her, and the words fell on her ear before she realised their import:

"Yes," said the voice of Agnes Maitland; "the strange illness of my father had sent every other thought out of my mind, and I quite forgot to write and ask you to postpone your visit. But since you are here, and have come all this way, you will stay to lunch, and meet my step-mother? She is almost as anxious to meet you as you were to meet her!"

"It's very good of you, Miss Maitland," said a masculine voice; "I ought really to have notified when I was coming, but I took your invitation to be a general one, and postponed coming up until I remembered that I had work in London that needed my attention almost immediately, so I left Brighton, where I had been with a friend for some days, and came straight on here."

They moved on, and the woman in the room turned away with a set mouth and cold eyes. She was glad she had overheard the conversation. It had served as a preventive to surprise. And at lunch she would be prepared to meet her guest, Ernest Heath, outwardly calm, at least.

As her maid assisted her into a black, clinging robe, a whimsical fancy seized her to slightly powder her hair, and brush it in straight lines back from her forehead, giving her a wearied, almost middle-aged appearance that completely changed her from the brilliant, radiant woman of a few days ago.

On the stairs she met Woolf, looking excited and frightened.

"Oh, mummie!" he cried, clinging to her, "what do you think? 'The Hollies' has been burnt to the ground, and they say that poor Mr. North has been burnt too!"

Lady Maitland caught her breath with a sudden gasp!

"Let us hope it is not so bad as that, dear," she said soothingly. "Now you must be quiet and come down to lunch with me!"

When she and her son entered the dining-room, the man standing by the fireplace with Agnes Maitland, saw a tall, grave-looking woman with severely-dressed hair slightly grey, and a motherly smile on her face as she brought forward her boy.

"How do you do, Mr. Heath?" she said calmly, holding her hand out to the middle-aged, kindly-looking man who eyed her with scarcely concealed astonishment in his humorous blue eyes; "I have heard so much about you from Agnes, that I seem to know you already!"

"Is my step-mother at all like your cousin, Margaret Heath?" said Agnes sharply.

She saw the change in her father's wife, and knew that she had done it purposely. But how could she have guessed that Mr. Heath was coming to-day?

"No! Lady Maitland is not like my cousin, or even the photo. you showed me," he replied with emphasis.

Lady Maitland laughed. "I fear I always disappoint people who expect to find me like my photograph. I am really such a placid, ordinary person."

"I should hardly say that!" he replied courteously. "But I did see in London a girl the living image of my cousin."

"How strange!" said Agnes, watching her step-mother's flush, and the sparkle of satisfaction in her eyes.

"Yes," he continued, "she is secretary to the author, Vernon Vivyan, a great friend of mine. Her name is Ivy Lodge."

"How odd!" exclaimed Agnes, while her step-mother bit her lip with a sudden spasm. "*Ivy* is the name of the missing girl who is wanted by the police—Ivy Strange! What is she like?"

"Slim, with a perfect oval face," said Ernest Heath slowly; "large sad violet eyes; an aquiline nose; a beautiful brow, with a mass of copper-coloured hair growing low on it, and a red, tender mouth."

"That must be the same girl!" cried Agnes in delight. "Now she will be in the hands of the police very soon!"

"I hope not," murmured Heath.

"Excuse me, sir," said a stern, official voice in the open doorway; "I must ask you for the address of that young lady!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Ernest Heath hotly, as they sprang to their feet, Lady Maitland only remaining seated, with a white face.

"We have the warrant for her arrest, sir," replied Gilbert Chase, respectfully; "you are compelled to give it in the name of the law!"

"Don't!" breathed a low, intense voice at his elbow; and the guest saw her ladyship rise with quiet dignity, as she said to the detective:

"Mr. Chase, this is not a fit occasion for an argument of this nature to take place. If you go to the library, Mr. Heath will follow you with me, and there supply you with the address of the girl you think the missing Ivy Strange."

The detective bowed coldly. An unaccountable aversion had crept over him towards her ladyship.

He went to the library, and immediately the dining-room was emptied of its curious crowd, Lady Maitland turned to the man at her side.

"Mr. Heath! For my sake—for the sake of my poor husband! Go now, without giving the detective the address of that—girl! There is a train leaving Melton in ten minutes for London. The carriage is at the door for me, you take it and drive to the station."

"Why do you ask me? And if I go, what excuse will you make?"

She smiled. "I ask you in the name of mercy to leave! I will know how to deal with the detective!"

A few moments later, Gilbert Chase, pacing the library impatiently, saw the neat closed brougham going at a smart rate down the drive. "The doctor, I suppose," he muttered Then the handle of the door turned, and he raised his eyes expectantly. "Now to get that address and snare my bird!"

Lady Maitland smiled apologetically as she came forward. "So sorry, Mr. Chase, but Mr. Heath was obliged to go without seeing you!"

An ugly look crossed the detective's face as he realised how the beautiful woman facing him had, for her own purposes, outwitted him.

"Gone!" he said slowly. "It occurs to me, madam, that you sent him away because you were afraid! But I heard the name of the author, Mr. Vivyan, so only a little time is lost!"

She turned to go, but the detective with a swift gesture, put his hand on the door.

"One word, your ladyship," he said coolly; "I want to ask you a few questions."

She drew herself up haughtily. "You forget yourself, my man! You heard all I could tell you long ago. Let me pass!"

He smiled. "I am afraid it is another subject, your ladyship. Do you remember a photograph about eighteen years ago being left at a Mrs. Phillpot's, in Enniamore Gardens, London, by a *Mrs. Margaret Grant, the wife of the convicted felon, Vernon Grant?*"

Watching her keenly, he saw her eyes dilate suddenly, while her short upper lip quivered. She opened her mouth to speak, but a momentary dryness of her throat tied her tongue. Then, above the beating of her heart, the triumphant voice of Agnes Maitland rang out clearly:

"Ask her to explain the existence of the paper informing her that 'V.G. died a year after his release!'"

(To be concluded shortly.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Agreed to Differ.

"I have been very intimate with a young man for two years," writes "S. E.," "but we have lately quarrelled. We decided that each of us got on better with somebody else. Accordingly he has taken up with another girl, I with another man. Now in my heart of hearts, I miss him very much, and am quite sure I really love him better than the other. I believe, too, that he feels the same. But how are we to explain matters to our new lovers?"

* * * * *

By all means go back to each other, if you feel as you say. Be quite candid about it to your new lovers. Any deception will be fatal to all parties.

Outside or Inside a 'Bus?

"Edie" travels by omnibus a great deal. The other day she learnt that there was only one remaining seat outside, and a gentleman had boarded the 'bus directly after her. Should she take the seat or surrender it to him?

* * * * *

I think it would be graceful for you to allow the man to take the outside seat, and go inside yourself. It would be a return courtesy for that he would show you were it a wet day and you struggling against him for the seat inside. Besides, it is not really warmer inside a 'bus than outside in summer, from a girl's point of view. The scorching sun is far worse for the complexion and general comfort in town than the stuffiness of the inside. I believe that a girl should get as much open air and sun as possible, but not by clambering in front of men on to the tops of omnibuses.

Tracking a Vanished Lover.

"Helen" writes: "A few months ago I was suddenly taken ill, and had to be removed for change of air. While away a friend called to see me and my mother told him she could not give my new address as I was to be kept quiet. Since I have returned I have made inquiries and find that my visitor—of whom I am really very fond—has opened a business as a dairyman, I believe somewhere in the Blackfriars district. Now I want to find him, but how am I do so? At present I have no clue."

* * * * *

Well, "Helen," if he is fond of you, he will no doubt take another opportunity of finding you. Do you not know his late address, from which you could get his present whereabouts? As he has only just moved, the directory would not give his address, but I think you might find out by inquiries at the district post office, which would have been notified of the new arrival. As a new tradesman, he would be more easily found than a private residence. No doubt in a week or two you will be able to trace him. If not, as a last resort, try the personal columns of one of the dailies.

Speaking of "The Wife."

"In speaking of my wife," writes "V. B." "to strangers or guests, how should I designate her—Mrs. Dash, or by her Christian name?"

* * * * *

To strangers or guests you do not know very well, certainly use your surname and "Mrs." To people with whom you are very intimate, you could use the Christian name.

Accepting Theatre Invitations.

"Is it right for a girl to go to the theatre with a man to whom she is not engaged?" asks "G. S." "I am constantly being invited to do so by certain young men, but have always refused so far."

* * * * *

These things are decided largely by the parties themselves. If a girl is used to going about, and is able to meet men without compromising herself with neighbours and kind friends, she can accept a theatre invitation without fear. A great many girls in London Society go out unchaperoned nowadays; that is to say, girls who are not very young.

* * * * *

However, if a girl lives in a very quiet place, and is not in the habit of going to places of amusement, and has neighbours and friends likely to be shocked by such things, she might best consult her interests by refusing invitations unless accompanied by a parent or relation.

Reading a Love Letter.

"Flora's" lover was staying at her home recently, and in putting his room straight, "Flora" picked up a letter addressed to him, and signed "yours always." She could not help reading it, and discovered that it was from another girl, and quite recently written. Was she wrong to read it, and if so, how can she act?

* * * * *

It was, of course, wrong to read it, but I am afraid not one girl in a hundred would have done other than you have. I should hand it back to him, and warn him against leaving letters about which might be read by others. You need not say you have read it, but leave it to him to offer any explanations. His future actions will show you whether you are to continue trusting him, or whether he is deceiving you. For all you know, the letter may be written in a strain which is distasteful to him. That is for him to explain. Above all, don't be too suspicious.

The First Wedding Ring Question.

"A Reader" is kind enough to give his opinion on the question of disposing of the first wedding-ring, dealt with by me recently. "I am in a similar position to 'One in Doubt,'" he says; "my wife wears an engagement ring given her by her first lover, who died suddenly, and could not redeem his pledge. Though I am only too glad to have taken his place, I do not object to this.

* * * * *

"I think your correspondent who is about to be married for the second time, and does not know how to dispose of her first wedding-ring, should lay the matter before her *fiancé*. If he really loves her, he would not insist on anything which would hurt her feelings. If she loved her dead husband then she ought to keep this memory of him. However, she might have a small stone inserted in the ring, which would change the nature of the article to the outside world. If, of course, she did not think pleasantly of her late husband, the ring could be removed."

Cynthia

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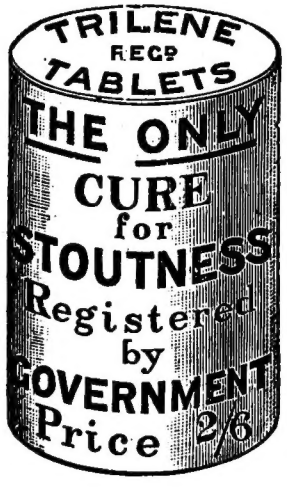

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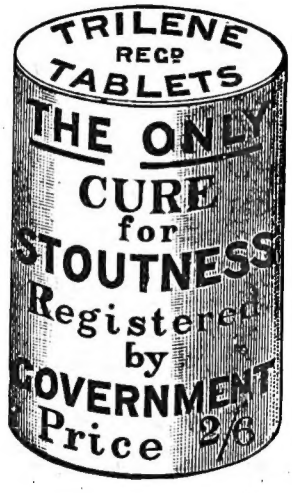

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.
Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagilit, Wales, write Nov. 22nd, 1896: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone fro[illegible] taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have don world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 33 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 5lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

Anæmia

INDIGESTION, HEADACHE, AND LOSS OF APPETITE CURED.

"I ALMOST USED TO FEEL THAT I SHOULD LIKE TO DIE, so awful were my sufferings,' said Mrs. John Smith, 1 Village, Lelley, Preston, Holderness, to a reporter of the "Hull News." "I was tortured for nearly seven years by Anæmia and Indigestion. I seemed to have no blood in me. My fingers were 'dead' and they trembled so violently that it was an impossibility for me to pick up a plate without letting it drop. My feet were always cold, and they used to swell to such an extent that I did not know how to walk. Work was not possible, on account of agonising pains, and a severe burning sensation in my head. My appetite failed me completely, and I was always troubled by dizziness.

"I consulted no fewer than five doctors, and attended the Dispensary at Hull. I consumed large quantities of medicine, which only made my teeth rot, and my gums very soft. The last doctor I consulted advised me to get a bicycle. I did so, but I had not the strength and energy to ride it. He also told me to go and reside in the country (at this time I was living in Hull) away from the smoke and dust, for if I did not I should be dead in a few weeks. I followed out his advice, but no benefit resulted from the change.

"I was in this helpless and terrible condition when a lady friend of mine residing in Buckingham Street, Hull, brought to my notice Bile Beans for Biliousness, as they had cured her of Bilious Bouts. I saw an advertisement in a paper and sent for a sample box. I took the contents and felt somewhat better, as all my dizziness completely disappeared. I persevered with the use of the Beans, and the result has been marvellous. My head was cleared. I have now a keen appetite, can do my work with pleasure, and go out and enjoy my cycle rides. I am completely cured, and restored to perfect health. I firmly believe that but for Bile Beans for Biliousness I should now have been in my grave."

"Go out and enjoy my cycle rides."

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